

Center for the Study of Community Colleges

# Reforming Transfer and Articulation in California

Four Statewide Solutions for Creating a More Successful and  
Seamless Transfer Path to the Baccalaureate

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## Executive Summary

In February 2009, leaders of California’s public college and university systems announced the formation of a joint task force that would consider substantive reforms to the transfer process and identify ways to increase the number of community college students transferring to the state’s four-year universities. Despite high expectations, as the extent of California’s 2009 budget crisis became clear, Task Force leaders decided to limit their recommendations to a set of modest, low-cost activities to which each system could immediately commit.

This study begins to close the gap between what most college leaders and analysts agree is necessary—systemic reform of California’s transfer and articulation system—and the short-term, immediately feasible recommendations contained in the Task Force’s interim report. Guiding the recommendations contained in this report are three basic principles:

- The transfer pathway(s) must be **transparent** and easy for students, faculty, and advisers to understand.
- In exchange for successfully completing a defined transfer pathway, students must receive a **guarantee** that their courses will automatically transfer and be counted toward general education (GE) and major preparation requirements at public four-year institutions in the state.
- In developing transfer pathways, care must be taken to strike a **balance** between curricular standardization and faculty/institutional autonomy.

Based on information gathered from in-depth, qualitative interviews with all members of the 2009 Transfer Task Force, this report recommends four top-priority statewide solutions for creating a more seamless and successful transfer path to the baccalaureate: 1) transfer associate degrees; 2) descriptor-based articulation; 3) a statewide online academic planning tool; and 4) shared messaging about transfer and financial aid. The report also describes the major challenges in enacting these reforms, as well as possible ways of overcoming them, and outlines next steps for improving transfer in California.

### *Transfer Associate Degrees*

The development of transfer associate degrees, which encompass a common, statewide GE curriculum and specific areas of emphasis that can be applied toward students’ lower-division major preparation, is an effective and efficient way of systemically improving California’s transfer and articulation process, and should be endorsed by policymakers, as well as faculty and administrative leaders at all three of California’s college and university systems. However, if these transfer associate degrees are to be effective, they must guarantee that, upon completion of the degree:

- Students will be granted admission to a public university in the state (and possibly be given priority admission to the campus and major of their choice).
- Courses taken in fulfillment of the transfer associate degree will transfer en bloc to any four-year public university in the state, will satisfy all lower-division GE requirements, and with few exceptions, courses taken in areas of emphasis will be applied as credit toward the major at the receiving institution.

Furthermore, the implementation of transfer associate degrees should not invalidate existing or future course-to-course and campus-to-campus articulation agreements so that specialized, collaborative programs between community colleges and universities can continue to thrive, and so that there are still available pathways to transfer for students who choose not to complete a transfer associate degree.

## *Descriptor-Based Articulation*

Descriptor-based articulation (i.e., the Course Identification Numbering System, known as C-ID) may be an effective way of achieving the goals of common course numbering while avoiding potential pitfalls that might occur in attempts to implement a truly standardized and commonly numbered system. We recommend that the community colleges continue to fund this project, and that faculty and administrative leaders at all three public systems and the private universities strongly encourage their faculty to become involved in developing descriptors and in approving them as the standard for articulation with community college courses. Furthermore, in order to ensure more widespread implementation, we recommend that C-ID incorporate an “opt-out” policy whereby if four or more campuses within a system accept a given C-ID descriptor, then by default all of the campuses would accept it unless they provide an acceptable reason for opting out.

To be most effective, C-ID must be conceptualized as part of a larger statewide initiative such as the development of transfer associate degrees, a truly common GE curriculum, and/or statewide major preparation pathways or areas of emphasis. Going forward, we recommend that C-ID project leaders work closely with those developing such statewide initiatives, and prioritize the development and approval of descriptors in curricular areas at the core of these reforms.

## *Statewide Online Academic Planning Tool*

Upgrading California’s repository for articulation agreements (ASSIST) and linking that application to a statewide online academic planning tool are essential steps in systemically improving California’s transfer and articulation process, and in making that process more transparent and efficient for students, faculty, and advisers. Plans for a Next Generation ASSIST are already underway, and we recommend that the three college and university systems provide full support and funding for this very important project.

However, if Next Generation ASSIST is to achieve its full potential, it must be linked with a statewide online academic planning tool that allows students to chart their progress toward transfer and a degree at any institution in the state. Although all three systems are in the process of developing their own academic planning and degree audit applications, an online tool that includes all California colleges and universities (including both public and private institutions) is essential. A true statewide online academic planning system is particularly important for community college students who may be preparing for transfer to more than one university (or those taking classes at more than one college or university), but it will also be useful to native four-year students who wish to explore how the courses they have taken will fulfill requirements for various majors at their home and other institutions.

## *Shared Messaging about Transfer and Financial Aid*

Inter-segmental efforts to provide shared messages to current and incoming college students about the multiple postsecondary pathways to the baccalaureate, as well as strategies for navigating those pathways, can make California’s transfer and articulation process more transparent, and will help to develop the notion that transfer is a viable and cost-effective path to the baccalaureate. However, these messages would be most effective if they are backed by statewide reforms that provide greater transfer and articulation assurances to students, such as the implementation of transfer associate degrees, and if they include consistent advice about how to best utilize federal and state financial aid to support students throughout their postsecondary careers.

## *Overcoming Challenges in Enacting These Reforms*

California faces numerous challenges in enacting the four statewide transfer and articulation reforms recommended in this report. These challenges, as well as possible ways of overcoming them, can be summarized as follows:

### **System and Institutional Silos**

- Implement discipline-based, inter-segmental faculty commissions that can work to balance greater standardization of lower-division, transferrable courses with respect for faculty and institutional autonomy and curricular quality.

### **Faculty Autonomy**

- Engage faculty as active participants in inter-segmental transfer and articulation reform efforts.
- Provide incentives, such as stipends or changes to promotion/tenure procedures.
- Legislate transfer associate degrees and/or other systemic transfer and articulation reforms, giving faculty the opportunity to make all curricular and articulation decisions as long as they do so in an acceptable amount of time.

### **Un-Common Academic Calendars**

- Engage in cost/benefit analyses of implementing a common academic calendar and inform faculty and staff operating on quarter systems of the benefits of semesters.

### **Underprepared Community College Students**

- Support statewide and inter-segmental implementation of the Early Assessment Program.
- Consider adopting common assessment and placement tools at all California community colleges.

### **University Capacity**

- Consider wider implementation of hybrid and online programs at all California colleges and universities.
- Explore authorizing some community colleges to confer the baccalaureate in certain applied fields and/or encourage UC and CSU faculty to teach upper-division courses on some community college campuses.

### **The Master Plan and Lack of Statewide Coordination**

- Support the implementation of transfer associate degrees.
- Reform or replace the California Postsecondary Education Commission (CPEC) to ensure that a statewide coordinating body has the power and authority to lead inter-segmental initiatives.
- Explore authorizing community college baccalaureates in the future to resolve capacity problems.

### **Lack of Funding**

- Demonstrate a serious commitment to implementing systemic transfer and articulation reforms in order to be competitive for federal and philanthropic funding.
- Publicize to legislators and the general public the cost savings and economic benefits that may result from systemic transfer and articulation reform.

## *Next Steps for California*

Since the establishment of the 1960 Master Plan for Higher Education, California has been at the forefront of progressive higher education policy and practice, and because of its commitment to open access and system fluidity, the state has more than once been recognized as the most successful model for postsecondary education and training in the country. Unfortunately, due to many years of underfunding, a less-relevant Master Plan, competition among systems, and battles over curricular territory, California's system of higher education is no longer recognized as the best or most influential. Indeed, we are witnessing a slow but steady disinvestment in California public education by the federal government and philanthropic foundations, reportedly due to beliefs that the state's problems are too entrenched and that there is not a significant desire—on the part of legislators or educators—to engage in significant systemic reforms.

It is not too late to reverse this trend. Indeed, our current fiscal circumstances provide California with an incredible opportunity to reclaim its title of the best and most accessible higher education system in the country. However, doing so will require: A) acknowledging that we have not and are not living up to the spirit of the Master Plan, which envisioned a clear path to any postsecondary degree or certificate for all California students; and B) making a serious commitment to implementing systemic transfer and articulation reforms, such as transfer associate degrees, that will make the transfer path to the baccalaureate more viable, transparent, and effective for all students.

The first step in this process must be to ensure that any legislation authorizing the development of transfer associate degrees includes a guarantee that if students complete such a degree, they will be admitted to a public university in the state, and their units will satisfy all lower-division GE requirements and be applied toward their major. The second step may be to reconvene the Community College Transfer Task Force or a similar group to oversee the implementation of transfer associate degrees, a statewide online academic planning tool, and/or other systemic reforms. The Task Force must have the power to assemble inter-segmental faculty and staff commissions, and the authority to impose commission objectives and timelines. A primary initial goal of the Task Force might be to help the Inter-Segmental Committee of Academic Senates (ICAS) and the individual systems' academic senates understand the importance and timeliness of such initiatives, and to ensure their support.

## *Next Steps for Our Project*

The next step for our project is to gather information from other states that can assist California in successfully implementing transfer associate degrees, a statewide online academic planning tool linked to a Next Generation ASSIST, and/or other statewide transfer and articulation reforms. In the next phase of our study we will visit 3 states that have successfully implemented these initiatives (most likely Florida, Arizona, and Oregon), identify the political processes, actors, and associations that were instrumental in bringing about the reforms, and describe implementation strategies that may be successfully utilized in California. We will also be asking how states funded the development of transfer associate degrees and other statewide reforms, and will be examining the effects of such initiatives on curricular quality and student success. We expect to complete this phase of our project and report back to legislators and UC, CSU, and CCC leaders by January 2011.

## Project Description

In February 2009, leaders of California's public college and university systems announced the formation of a joint task force that would consider substantive reforms to the transfer process and identify ways to increase the number of community college students transferring to the state's four-year universities. Although efforts at reforming the transfer process created under the state's 1960 Master Plan for Higher Education have been undertaken periodically, the 2009 Transfer Task Force was the first time administrative and faculty leaders from all three systems had come together to move past piecemeal efforts and identify collaborative strategies that can strengthen the transfer path to the baccalaureate.

The formation of the Community College Transfer Task Force was timely, as several reports have shown California slipping in its ability to produce a college-educated workforce. The state currently ranks 42<sup>nd</sup> in the nation in the percentage of bachelor's degrees awarded to high school graduates within six years (NCHEMS, 2009), and under current trends, by 2025 will educate one million fewer college graduates than are needed in the workforce (Johnson & Sengupta, 2009). Improving California's complex and confusing transfer process, many analysts argue, is key to improving bachelor's degree production, as two-thirds of all first-time college students in California begin at a community college, yet only a small proportion of them—between 25 and 35 percent, depending upon the parameters used to define the likely transfer population—successfully move on to a four-year institution. And as Moore, Shulock, and Jensen (2009) point out, even when students do transfer, some do so with a significant number of credits that do not count toward a bachelor's degree, and many others make the transition without completing the full lower-division transfer curriculum or before earning an associate degree. These patterns are costly to both the state and its students.

Despite high expectations for the Transfer Task Force, the extent of California's 2009 budget crisis soon became clear and a decision was made to limit the recommendations contained within the interim report (Community College Transfer Task Force, 2009) to a set of modest, low-cost activities to which each system could immediately commit.

This study begins to close the gap between what most college leaders and analysts agree is necessary—systemic reform of California's transfer and articulation system—and the short-term, immediately feasible recommendations contained in the Task Force's interim report. Based on information gathered from in-depth, qualitative interviews with all members of the 2009 Transfer Task Force, this report identifies four top-priority statewide solutions for creating a more seamless and successful transfer path to the baccalaureate, and describes possible ways of overcoming challenges in enacting these reforms. The report concludes with next steps, both for California and for the subsequent phase of our project.

Our hope is that this report, which takes into account the ideas and perspectives of Transfer Task Force members, will stimulate debate among administrative and faculty leaders at all three of California's higher education segments, and will help to guide efforts within the three systems, the private universities, and California's legislature to make systemic improvements to California's transfer and articulation process.



## Guiding Principles for Implementing Transfer and Articulation Reforms

In this report we move beyond low-cost, immediately feasible practices and propose a coherent and integrated set of solutions for creating a more successful and seamless path to the baccalaureate. The four recommended reforms emerged as top priorities for California through in-depth interviews with Transfer Task Force members, as well as our own knowledge of transfer and articulation initiatives that have been implemented successfully in other states. We believe these four solutions can and should be undertaken simultaneously, and that California's current fiscal uncertainty provides a window in which widespread support of these reforms may be more likely.

The second half of the report outlines the perceived obstacles to enacting these reforms, as well as possible ways of overcoming them. Some of these challenges may be overcome fairly easily—indeed, solutions to some are already underway—and others are a bit more involved. Nonetheless, we feel it is important for legislators and system leaders to have a clear understanding of the perceived barriers to systemic transfer and articulation reform, so that each can be adequately addressed in plans for implementation.

Guiding the recommendations included in both sections of this report are three basic principles:

- The transfer pathway(s) must be **transparent** and easy for students, faculty, and advisers to understand.
- In exchange for successfully completing a defined transfer pathway, students must receive a **guarantee** that their courses will automatically transfer and be counted toward general education and major preparation requirements at a public four-year institution in the state.
- In developing transfer pathways, care must be taken to strike a **balance** between curricular standardization and faculty/institutional autonomy.

These three ideas are central to the four top-priority recommendations in this report, as well as suggestions for overcoming implementation challenges, and should be considered guiding principles for the development and implementation all future transfer and articulation reforms.

## Four Top-Priority Statewide Solutions

Through in-depth, qualitative interviews with members of the Community College Transfer Task Force, we have identified four statewide solutions as feasible and effective ways to create a more seamless and successful transfer and articulation system in California: 1) transfer associate degrees; 2) descriptor-based articulation; 3) a statewide online academic planning tool; and 4) shared messaging about transfer and financial aid.

Several of the statewide solutions discussed in this report are already in progress or under discussion, and most are supported, at least in part, by the UC, CSU, and CCC faculty and administrative leaders interviewed for this project, signaling that widespread acceptance of each solution may be achievable.

### *Transfer Associate Degrees*

Transfer associate degrees, although they are implemented differently in different states, are generally comprised of a statewide general education (GE) curriculum with specific unit requirements; some guarantee of transfer to and acceptance of completed units at four-year institutions in the state; the inclusion of lower-division major preparation courses or courses within a specific area of emphasis that can be applied toward a major; and minimal local “add on” or “opt-out” options for four-year institutions, except in some specialized majors. Six other states (Arizona, Florida, New Jersey, North Carolina, Oregon, and Washington) have implemented associate degrees for transfer, and although most were put in place relatively recently, some positive outcomes have already been documented (Moore, Shulock, and Jensen, 2009).

Creating transfer associate degrees is perhaps the most effective and efficient way to significantly improve California’s transfer and articulation pathway and, in the process, increase the number and percentage of bachelor’s degree recipients in the state. Furthermore, the development of transfer associate degrees encompasses several other transfer reform ideas that have been tried or discussed in the past, including a common statewide GE curriculum and agreed-upon lower-division major preparation pathways or areas of emphasis.

Interviews with members of the Transfer Task Force illustrate that there is widespread support for the development of transfer associate degrees among the three higher education segments. Indeed, many interviewees mentioned the benefits of such degrees, particularly in their ability to ensure transparency throughout the transfer process, to provide transfer and articulation guarantees to students, to ensure greater standardization of lower-division coursework, and to more efficiently and cost effectively utilize the transfer path to the baccalaureate:

“Right now students have way too much variability confronting them when they are trying to move forward from a community college to a higher division of a university. So across campuses, and maybe across systems, I think we ought to get some agreement about what is an appropriate lower-division set of courses for history, or social sciences, or chemistry, or whatever. We should do much better with that than we do now. We have way more variability than what I think is pedagogically required.” (UC administrator)

“Students understand what a degree means; they don’t always understand when you tell them to just take this set our courses. So I think [a transfer AA degree] would be powerful.” (CSU administrator)

Despite widespread acceptance of the idea of transfer associate degrees, many Task Force members were quick to point out that if these degrees are to be effective and useful, they must incorporate something that current legislation on the topic (AB 440) does not: a guarantee to students that if they complete a transfer associate degree, they will be admitted to a university in the state, and their units will satisfy lower-division GE requirements and be applied toward their major:

“You have to have the articulation agreements that guarantee the transfer for students so the counselor can say, “If you follow this path, if you get this GPA, you will be accepted into this institution.” (CCC administrator)

“If you want a seamless system, you’ve got to have the faculty at the four-year institutions be willing to trust and accept the certification of courses by community college faculty.” (CSU administrator)

Furthermore, some interviewees argued that the concept of catalog rights—which guarantees that students will be held to the degree requirements in place at the time they began their studies, provided they remain continuously enrolled or do not leave for more than one regular term—must be extended to transfer AA degrees. As one community college administrator noted, “If they are told this is what you need to do in order to transfer, if the student remains on that path consistently, why should they have to confront changes halfway or three-quarters the way through their path?” She went on to say: “One of our biggest frustrations is that the CSU is extremely consistent in saying that they guarantee admission to all fully-prepared community college students... but while they say that, the definition of a fully-prepared student changes at will.”

If transfer associate degrees are to be developed in California, one issue that will need to be worked out is whether the degrees should be specific to each major, or whether they should focus instead on certain areas of emphasis that are tied to several different but related disciplines. Title V of the California Code of Regulations mandates that 18 semester or 27 quarter units of any associate degree must be taken in a major or area of emphasis. Based on interviews with Task Force members, instructional faculty typically prefer that all associate degrees be tied directly to the majors, which gives them the greatest amount of control over the courses students must take. Administrators, however, tend to believe that transfer associate degrees would be more effective—not to mention easier to implement—if students were asked to complete courses within certain areas of emphasis, such as social sciences, or the humanities, that would count as major prerequisites for several different disciplines at all universities in the state. In the words of one CCC administrator:

“The truth is you can actually pattern the GE requirement to come up with areas of emphases, and that’s basically what we have done. We have a liberal arts area of emphasis that is social sciences, and another one that is arts and humanities. So students take classes in an area of emphasis, but they don’t end up having to take things that they don’t need to transfer. And you can have things double-count as the area of emphasis as well as the GE. It’s just a matter of taking the time to set these up.”

Although most Task Force members supported the idea of transfer associate degrees, some noted potential downsides. A frequent refrain, especially from community college personnel, was that the implementation of transfer associate degrees might further the misconception that community colleges exist solely for the purpose of preparing students for transfer, and that it would ultimately reduce the colleges’ commitment to their other missions, such as workforce preparation and continuing education. Other interviewees pointed out that transfer associate degrees do little for students’ economic prospects if they cannot or choose not to make the leap to a senior institution:

“If we want students to obtain a degree, it seems to make sense that I would want my associate degree in psychology, not in transfer.... If I wasn’t able to transfer—maybe I had all the preparation but maybe not the GPA, or my life changed and I couldn’t go on—at least I would have a degree in something.”  
(CCC administrator)

Despite these concerns, there is some evidence to suggest that because current associate degrees do not dovetail perfectly with transfer requirements, several community colleges actually encourage their students to take only the courses required for transfer, and skip those that are required for the associate degree but that the universities may not apply as credit toward a major. As one community college administrator noted, “In terms of counseling, we tend to advise them to take very little of the majors. Our own faculty really like to have degrees that they can offer, but a degree in psychology doesn’t do much for transfer.... [Our college] has a fairly large number of students who don’t get the AA degree, they just take the transfer requirements.”

Although this practice of advising students away from traditional associate degrees may reduce the number of excess units a community college student may take in order to prepare for transfer and achieve a bachelor’s degree, it clearly limits the cost-effectiveness of the transfer path to the baccalaureate, as students transfer before completing all of their lower-division coursework. The implementation of transfer associate degrees would help to solve this problem, as it would eliminate the discrepancies between transfer and associate degree requirements, as well as the incentives that currently exist for students to transfer to a university prior to completing their lower-division units.

As mentioned at the beginning of this section, a primary component of a transfer associate degree is a common statewide GE curriculum. Although some interviewees argued that California already has a common GE—“We already have this. It’s called IGETC!” (CSU administrator)—others noted that the multiple GE options are confusing for community college students. As one CSU administrator noted, “We ask students if they have the CSU Breadth pattern, or the IGETC, or the San Diego pattern, which is their own variation of the GE, and they look at you like you’re crazy! [Students] shouldn’t have to know what GE pattern they have, there should be one!”

As Task Force members related, conversations about the necessity of creating a truly common GE pattern have already been occurring, at least on some levels. Most interviewees felt that a common GE would be effective in improving transfer and making the process more transparent to students, but others argued that a common GE curriculum by itself does not go far enough. As one community college administrator noted, “I think at the moment the structure we have for GE works pretty well.... The thing that is missing is the connection with the majors.”

Agreement upon a common GE curriculum is extremely important for transfer students so that they are not limited in their choice of universities by the GE pattern they were initially advised to follow. However, rather than beginning with a statewide effort to create a truly common GE, as some Transfer Task Force members have suggested, the first step should be to convene select groups of faculty from all three segments to create a common GE core specifically for the transfer associate degrees, which will perhaps vary slightly by area of emphasis. Over time, as more and more students utilize the transfer path to the baccalaureate, the common GE core developed for the transfer associate degrees will slowly but surely supplant the disparate GE requirements at the UC and CSU systems.

**CSCC Recommendation:** The development of transfer associate degrees, which encompass a common GE curriculum and specific areas of emphasis that can be applied toward students' lower-division major preparation, is an effective and efficient way of systemically improving California's transfer and articulation process, and should be endorsed by faculty and administrative leaders at all three of California's college and university systems. However, if these transfer associate degrees are to be effective, they must guarantee that, upon completion of the degree:

- Students will be granted admission to a public university in the state (and possibly be given priority admission to the campus and major of their choice).
- Courses taken in fulfillment of the transfer associate degree will transfer en bloc to any four-year public university in the state, will fulfill all lower-division GE requirements, and with few exceptions, courses taken in areas of emphasis will be applied as credit toward the major at the receiving institution.

Furthermore, the implementation of transfer associate degrees should not invalidate existing or future course-to-course and campus-to-campus articulation agreements so that specialized, collaborative programs between community colleges and universities can continue to thrive, and so that there are still available pathways to transfer for students who choose not to complete a transfer associate degree.

### *Descriptor-Based Articulation*

Common course numbering has arisen as a popular method for facilitating transfer and articulation, and in recent years several states have implemented or begun planning for such systems. Conversations with Transfer Task Force members revealed an underlying belief in the benefits of common course numbering—as one UC administrator stated, “I think that it would just make life so much easier for students if we had a common course numbering system where students could know that if you took history whatever here, it is history whatever at this campus as well”—but many also expressed reservations about the feasibility of implementing a truly common course numbering system in California. In the words of a UC administrator:

“There is no way in the world that a truly common course numbering system is going to work with respect to the University of California. However, I find it extraordinarily hard to believe that there are *no* courses that could have a common course number. So my feeling is that this is a prime area for a partial solution. If we identified the top 10, 20, 30 courses—and actually got the faculty to agree on what the content for some of these most common courses should be—and if it fit whatever boundaries the faculty chose—then I find it hard to believe that we couldn't come up with some common course numbers.”

The Course Identification Numbering System (C-ID), a project of the California Community Colleges, has emerged in recent years as just such a partial solution, and was included in the Community College Transfer Task Force's (2009) recommendations as a cost-effective strategy to strengthen transfer to UC and CSU. C-ID aims to simplify articulation among all postsecondary segments and institutions by “developing a process that identifies course commonalities while respecting local variations in courses that commonly transfer” (California Community Colleges, n.d., p. 1). Rather than forcing faculty to agree on common course numbers, the C-ID project involves faculty from all three segments in developing C-ID descriptors that—once approved as meeting university requirements—can be the standards against which community college courses are articulated. In theory, any community college course that is

articulated to a C-ID descriptor will be automatically accepted at participating four-year institutions, saving time and money involved in more traditional course-to-course articulation, and making the transfer process easier and more transparent for students, faculty, and advisers.

C-ID is essentially a voluntary process; faculty may or may not choose to participate in the development of the descriptors, and universities either will or will not accept courses that articulate to a given C-ID descriptor. While the voluntary nature of the project may facilitate its implementation (it may, for example, ease some concerns among university faculty that they will be forced to accept as equal courses that they believe do not adequately prepare students for upper-division work at their institution), it also means that there is no guarantee that descriptor-based articulation will actually be implemented on a broad enough basis across the state to substantially affect transfer and articulation. This concern was reflected in conversations with Task Force members. As one CSU administrator argued:

“[C-ID] is a first step, but I don’t think it’s going to get them all the way home.... What are the major components of an introductory English composition course? And then [those committees] have the power to say that this course counts for English 1.... I don’t know exactly what the C-ID project is going to do in terms of forcing the approval of the courses. So that’s where it gets a little tough.”

One way to address this potential problem would be to implement a scenario similar to that used for acceptance of GE/IGETC courses at the UC system, as well as the process for course qualification used in the now-defunct California Articulation Number (CAN) project at CSU, both of which stipulated that if 4 or more campuses within a system accepted a given community college course as transferrable, then by default all the campuses would accept it unless they actively opted out. The same scenario could be applied to the C-ID project, thus ensuring that C-ID descriptors approved by at least four campuses within a system would be widely accepted, except in cases where individual departments provide an acceptable reason for opting out.

While there was widespread support for the C-ID project among members of the Transfer Task Force, several interviewees noted that C-ID should be considered more as a means to an end, rather than an end in itself. More specifically, they felt that unless the C-ID project is focused around a common GE core or popular major preparation pathways or areas of emphasis, its ability to facilitate improved transfer and articulation in California will be limited. As one UC administrator noted, “C-ID in and of itself may provide us with some economies and may be beneficial for a number of reasons, but it can’t stand alone. It needs to be part of a bigger initiative.”

**CSCC Recommendation:** The notion of descriptor-based articulation in general, and the C-ID project in particular, may be effective ways of achieving the goals of common course numbering while avoiding potential pitfalls that might occur in attempts to implement a truly standardized and commonly numbered system. We recommend that the CCC continue to fund this project, and that faculty and administrative leaders at all three public systems and the private universities strongly encourage their faculty to become involved in developing descriptors and in approving them as the standard for articulation with community college courses. Furthermore, in order to ensure more widespread implementation, we recommend that C-ID incorporate an “opt-out” policy whereby if four or more campuses within a system accept a given C-ID descriptor, then by default all of the campuses would accept it unless they provide an acceptable reason for opting out.

To be most effective, C-ID must be conceptualized as part of a larger statewide initiative such as the development of transfer associate degrees, a truly common GE curriculum, and/or statewide major

preparation pathways or areas of emphasis. Going forward, we recommend that C-ID project leaders work closely with those developing such statewide initiatives, and prioritize the development and approval of descriptors in curricular areas at the core of these reforms.

### *Statewide Online Academic Planning Tool*

In addition to the development of transfer associate degrees and continued support and acceptance of descriptor-based articulation through the C-ID project, perhaps the most common solution for improving transfer and articulation voiced by Transfer Task Force members was the creation of an online system that would provide students, faculty, and advisers with up-to-date information about transfer requirements, articulation agreements, and students' progress toward transfer and a degree. As one UC administrator put it, "More and more of our students are technologically able and they are—whether we like it or not—they are going to self-advise, so we'd better give them the best tools possible."

Currently, the official and only repository for CCC to CSU and UC lower-division course articulation agreements is the Articulation System Stimulating Inter-Institutional Student Transfer system (ASSIST). Despite its widespread support among all three segments of public higher education in California, it has become clear that ASSIST, in its current form, is limited in its utility. As the Community College Transfer Task Force report (2009) states, "The current system, built in 1985 and updated in the early 1990s, is cumbersome, inefficient, and does not map easily to a number of more recently-developed systems that rely on ASSIST for essential articulation data" (p. 4). A draft summary of the high-level functional requirements necessary to replace the current ASSIST software reads: "The software used to build the application is now obsolete and no longer supported by the vendor.... Currently, there is no alternative technology or paper back up should ASSIST become non-operational" (p. 2). For these reasons, the ASSIST Executive Management Oversight Committee (EMOC) has recommended replacing the ASSIST software, and several groups—including the Transfer Task Force (2009)—have concurred.

In 2008 the ASSIST EMOC drafted guiding principles and a vision for the development of a Next Generation ASSIST. One UC administrator involved in the project summarized it this way: "There are two areas of interest. We need a strong, flexible database. Currently in ASSIST there is a lot of information input in text that is not easily retrievable by other systems that use ASSIST.... So one goal is to create a very flexible database that will accommodate the needs of many users.... The second objective is to make it easier for articulation officers to enter and use the data."

In addition to upgrading ASSIST, many Task Force members argued that the purpose of the application should be expanded from a simple repository of articulation and transfer information to a fully-interactive degree audit and academic planning system that students, faculty, and advisers across the state can use to identify transferrable courses, see how courses may or may not apply to degree programs at different institutions, and create real-time academic plans for students. In the words of one CSU administrator:

"A centralized database—and maybe ASSIST will do it—but some sort of centralized degree audit system is probably one of the greatest strides that might be achievable given appropriate funding. Anything short of that is just tinkering at the edges, and the impact is going to be minor."

Interviews with Task Force members involved in discussions about upgrading ASSIST illustrate some tension between the online academic planning tools that many believe are necessary to improve transfer and articulation, and the immediate goals of Next Generation ASSIST. As one UC administrator

noted: “If we could have a more robust ASSIST, we could then create some of these online tools that everyone seems to think we need to have. For example: online advising for students and things to chart their progress through the community colleges and on to the universities and through the baccalaureate.”

It is clear that if California is to implement the type of online degree audit and transfer planning tools envisioned by Task Force members, two things must happen. First, Next Generation ASSIST must be supported and fully funded in order to build a robust and user-friendly application that provides searchable and up-to-date information on transferable courses, course-to-course articulation, major prep articulation, GE/IGETC requirements, and any transfer and articulation data required for future reforms, such as transfer associate degrees. Second, Next Generation ASSIST must be tightly coupled with a statewide online academic planning system that utilizes students’ transcript data in order to help them chart progress toward transfer and a degree at multiple institutions.

**CSCC Recommendation:** Upgrading to a Next Generation ASSIST and linking that application to a statewide academic planning tool are essential steps in systemically improving California’s transfer and articulation process, and in making that process more transparent and efficient for students, faculty, and advisers. Plans for a Next Generation ASSIST are already underway, and we recommend that the three college and university systems provide full support and funding for this very important project.

However, if Next Generation ASSIST is to achieve its full potential, it must be linked with a statewide online academic planning tool that allows students to chart their progress toward transfer and a degree at any institution in the state. Although all three systems are in the process of developing their own academic planning and degree audit applications, an online tool that includes all California colleges and universities (including both public and private institutions) is essential. A true statewide online academic planning system is particularly important for community college students who may be preparing for transfer to more than one university (or those taking classes at more than one college or university), but it will also be useful to native four-year students who wish to explore how the courses they have taken will fulfill requirements for various majors at their home and other institutions.

### *Shared Messaging about Transfer and Financial Aid*

Echoing recommendations in the Transfer Task Force’s (2009) interim report, several interviewees described the importance of all three postsecondary systems working together to create joint marketing and messaging efforts that portray California as having one public higher education system, with several different pathways for earning baccalaureate and other degrees:

“It is essential for us to really see ourselves as a whole. If a student comes to any of the segments, he or she should be able to... feel like he’s a part of the entire system. And this also means providing students with assurance that the courses they take will transfer and meet requirements at the university.” (CCC faculty)

Inter-segmental efforts to create a coherent set of messages (delivered to high school students, their families, and currently-enrolled college students) that portray all three segments as equal parts of a greater higher education system is a valid and important way to increase awareness of the transfer path to the baccalaureate, and to inform students of strategies for efficiently and effectively navigating the transfer pathway. However, unless this shared messaging is backed by significant statewide reforms to the transfer and articulation process, it amounts to little more than improved PR for an unchanged



product. Efforts to create and promote shared messaging about California's multiple pathways to the baccalaureate would be most effective if they coincided with implementation of transfer associate degrees and/or the necessary components of such degrees, including a truly common GE curriculum and well-articulated major preparation pathways or areas of emphasis.

Furthermore, providing consistent messages about the best way to utilize federal and state financial aid to support incoming college students' degree objectives must be a primary focus of any cooperative marketing and messaging efforts. According to one UC administrator: "The three [postsecondary segments] are not necessarily on the same page about financial aid.... We think there's a lot of potential to improve messaging around strategies that will enable students to pay for their college degree all the way through the baccalaureate."

**CSCC Recommendation:** Inter-segmental efforts to provide shared messages to current and incoming college students about the multiple postsecondary pathways to the baccalaureate, as well as strategies for navigating those pathways, have the potential to make California's transfer and articulation process more transparent, and will help develop the notion that transfer is a viable and cost-effective path to the baccalaureate. However, these messages should be backed by statewide reforms that provide greater transfer and articulation assurances to students, such as the implementation of transfer associate degrees, and should include consistent advice about how to best utilize federal and state financial aid to support students throughout their postsecondary careers.

## Overcoming Challenges in Enacting these Reforms

A clear understanding of the perceived barriers to systemic transfer and articulation reform is essential for legislators and system leaders working to strengthen the transfer path to the baccalaureate. This section outlines what Task Force members perceive as the primary challenges in enacting the four statewide transfer and articulation reforms described in this report, as well as possible ways of overcoming them.

### *System and Institutional Silos*

One of the major challenges to statewide transfer reform articulated in interviews with Transfer Task Force members was the fact that the CCC, the CSU, and the UC operate as three separate and distinct systems, each with multiple campuses, and each with their own leadership, culture, faculty priorities, student characteristics, and resource constraints. Although many interviewees noted that system and institutional silos have begun to break down in recent years through productive inter-institutional dialog, the silos still exist and negatively affect student transfer. As one UC faculty member illustrated:

“Not only do [students] need to know that that they want to transfer, they also need to know *where* they want to transfer. And not a UC versus a CSU, although that is important, but is it Cal State Northridge, or is it Cal State Fullerton? Because Cal State Fullerton might view or count the course one way, and Northridge might do it another way. Let alone the UC system. So in many senses you’ve got 112 community colleges that might have their own versions of how they approach counseling students, but then you’ve got 33—between the 23 CSUs and the 10 UCs—other versions of what needs to happen. This is anything but a well-integrated type of system.... Nobody seems to disagree with the fact that if you go to SMC and you know you want to transfer to the business department at UCLA that [you] can probably be served fairly well. But if you get more general than that, that’s where the problems come in.”

Even in collaborative, inter-segmental efforts such as the Transfer Task Force, system silos seemed apparent. Indeed, as one UC faculty member summarized, “We have three separate systems that ultimately have no accountability toward one another, and I think that really holds us back.” Further complicating the situation is the fact that even within systems, individual campuses sometimes work at odds to one another in order to preserve institutional identity, develop specialized fields of study, and so forth. Institutional silos thus exist even within the same system, and are accompanied, at times, by a reluctance to share information or engage in other collaborative practices that might enhance transfer. As one CSU administrator reported:

“Each campus has its culture, and if it means giving up something that people have a strong vested interest in, you’ll have all kinds of trouble.... One of the political challenges is that whenever you work on trying to make more seamless transitions from community college to one of the four-years, exchanging information is often a very useful thing. For example, I know the UC system is fairly diligent about being able to share information regarding applications for admissions, and individual student information. In the CSU we have a common application for admission, but separate admissions processing on each campus, and we aren’t really sharing information about the individual students.... Although today we’re turning away students because we don’t have the budget to serve them all, sometime tomorrow that’s not going to be the case. Institutions will in fact be competing with their peers for the same students, so the desire to share information is thwarted by the reluctance to share information.”

In response to a question about whether there is the political will at CSU to work on reforms that would include greater standardization across campuses, possibly even reconciling the CSU GE pattern with UC's IGETC pattern, one CSU administrator replied: "No. They wouldn't want to do it. Perfect example is San Diego State has its own pattern, and it's been that way ever since I've been [in California]. And they've gone through massive GE reevaluation of learning outcomes and assessments, and I'm pretty sure they don't want anyone to tinker with what they've just done." Lack of standardization and shared operating procedures is not limited to the Cal State campuses, however, as this CSU administrator explains:

"We have 7 community colleges in our service area, which is a lot, and they each have their own ways of communicating with their students and telling them what they think is best. And... in each of those community colleges there is the transfer center and there are the counselors who do most of the advising around transfer. And their relationship varies a lot between if they are in the same place and they talk to each other a lot and they communicate, to they are in separate parts of the campus and there is animosity among them. And if those folks don't get on the same page with the four-year schools, then we are working at cross-purposes."

**Possible Solutions:** Permeating the silos that exist both among and within California's segmented systems of higher education will be necessary if California is to enact the kind of systemic transfer and articulation reforms that can significantly strengthen the transfer path to the baccalaureate. However, this may be a long and arduous process—one that will likely be accomplished primarily through discipline-based inter-segmental faculty meetings—and, as one CSU administrator put it, will "require as much cultural change as systematic change." Thus, inter-segmental efforts to break down system and institutional silos must be undertaken in ways that balance greater standardization of lower-division, transferrable courses with respect for individual differences among campuses and departments. Furthermore, these efforts must be strongly encouraged by faculty and administrative leaders at all three systems, and must be framed in such a way that faculty and others understand the necessity of working in an inter-segmental manner to strengthen the transfer pathway.

### *Faculty Autonomy*

Faculty autonomy and academic freedom are typically seen as beneficial to the pursuit of knowledge and the transmission of that knowledge to college students. However, almost every single Transfer Task Force member interviewed for this study noted that faculty autonomy is the single biggest challenge to implementing systemic transfer and articulation reform:

"I think that faculty are the biggest impediment to having seamless transfer for our students. And that is faculty in all groups, including the community colleges. Everybody has their own particular—they are wedded to their own particular views of their discipline and how one gets prepared to be educated in that discipline. So you end up, as you probably know, with every college and every major having some little quirk different requirement, and if the students don't have it, they have to take it over when they get to the four-year school. Or they have to take more units at the community colleges." (CCC administrator)

"Faculty feel very, very protective of their own courses and their own departments on the campuses. So there's been a really remarkable degree of autonomy by faculty in their professional lives. Highly protected academic freedom. And I think this ultimately has led to some less-than-ideal outcomes.... So I think that one of the issues here has to do with faculty believing or accepting that some commonality actually is beneficial to students in the system. I think that's a significant problem." (UC administrator)

And because faculty at all three systems have seen transfer initiatives come and go in the past, many are skeptical about the efficacy of future reforms, as this CSU faculty member illustrates: “Part of the issue is getting really busy faculty who look at us and say there has been CAN, LDTP, and other transfer projects that have fallen apart, and why should we invest our time and energy in another project that’s also going to fall apart?” Perhaps driving faculty reluctance to participate in systemic transfer and articulation reforms is a level of distrust among professors in different segments and on different campuses:

“Of course there’s always the issue about quality of instruction received at community colleges; you’ve got this huge faculty arrogance that it’s only good if you get it from me. So we’ve got to really work, if you want a seamless system, you’ve got to have faculty at the four-year institutions be willing to trust and accept the certification of courses by community college faculty.” (CSU administrator)

Exacerbating the distrust among faculty members is the fact that UC professors have historically chosen not to participate in transfer and articulation efforts. And because the UC system has constitutional autonomy, there are few incentives for faculty to get involved, as illustrated by this UC administrator: “The legislature doesn’t have much sway over the UC except in the matter of funding, which is enough.... We don’t need nor seek very much legislative guidance.... You take a really great institution and ask it to change, and the first question is: why?”

Faculty autonomy is particularly challenging in efforts to identify common major preparation pathways or areas of emphasis, as CSU faculty and administrators learned through the Lower-Division Transfer Patterns (LDTP) project: “If you’re talking major transfer, now you’re really going to get the attention of faculty, because they all love their disciplines! And their reputation, and their department’s reputation, rest on the quality of their program and the students who graduate from their program. And their accreditation relies on that! So they hold tight to control of what students must do to get a degree from their department” (CSU faculty).

**Possible Solutions:** Clearly, faculty autonomy and distrust of courses taught at other institutions pose significant challenges to the implementation of systemic reforms such as transfer associate degrees, a common GE curriculum, descriptor-based articulation, and other initiatives. Nonetheless, Task Force members offered myriad solutions for encouraging faculty to support in such reforms. First, interviewees argued that it will be important to craft a message about the importance of faculty involvement that resonates with professors at the three different systems. And as one CSU administrator noted, that message probably has to focus more on what is in it for faculty, rather than how the initiative will benefit students: “Everybody has ownership of what they have right now, and they seem to like it. I think you’ve got to have something in it for them to want to change. And the good of the transfer students probably isn’t... what’s going to do it.”

Another Task Force member disagreed with this sentiment, however. He argued that appealing to professors’ natural tendencies to want to extend educational opportunity to all students (perhaps combined with the notion that faculty may be able to benefit from inter-segmental disciplinary meetings) will be most effective:

“I find it hard to believe that the faculty at the three segments are fundamentally opposed to educational opportunity for all California citizens... it seems to me that the way to get them on board is to try to transcend the very official boundaries and narrow paths that seem to be available and appeal to the notion that we are doing this not for our own individual egos or even disciplines, but that we are

doing it for the good of the students of the state of California. If you can find an effective way to make that appeal, that might be an effective way to break down the barriers that are in place. That might help you reach across bargaining units, union affiliation, sector affiliation, you know, that kind of thing.... ICAS would probably be in a good position to [cast the reforms as opportunities for faculty]; how much does a faculty member in one of the sectors have to interact with a faculty member in the other sectors?" (UC faculty)

Other interviewees argued that it will be important to convey to faculty that greater standardization of the lower-division will not necessarily lead to loss of control over the curriculum or lower quality instruction. As this UC administrator noted, "One argument [for greater standardization of lower-division curricula] is... by having a large degree of autonomy, we can't even swear that an individual professor's course is as good as another professor's course in the same department! And the faculty do not look at themselves individually all that carefully. So some commonality might actually improve quality in some instances."

Regardless of the message used to encourage faculty to cede some autonomy, put aside their distrust, and work in an inter-segmental fashion to improve transfer and articulation, it is clear that if such reforms are to be effective, faculty must be perceived as active participants, and must be fully engaged in the initiatives, preferably via discipline-based meetings of faculty from all three segments:

"You have to have people sitting in the same room discussing the common goal and the obstacles and then overcoming them.... I think that if faculty are given the information properly, if they understand, they will always make the right decisions on this. I think the lack of knowledge has caused some people to be skeptical. And you know it's going to take those kind of things coming from statewide leadership to individual faculty senates saying, 'let's get on board with these kinds of things.' Faculty talking to faculty is always the best way to do it.... So I think the academic senate, the statewide academic senate, can have a real role in this." (CCC administrator)

"I think there would be infinitely more trust, if not 100% more trust, by having faculty-to-faculty discussions about articulation." (UC faculty)

Some interviewees offered specific strategies for involving faculty in articulation discussions. As one UC administrator suggested, it makes sense to approach systemic transfer and articulation reforms in an incremental manner. In his words: "You start working with the group that has the starting point where things are the closest... you find the disciplines that are most willing to do it, and you build on those successes. I believe that they would benefit with relatively little if any loss of control or quality. So you get them on board and they can say, it worked for us.... I think if you had 50% of the courses, you'd have about 90% of the work done. Especially if you're focusing on the lower-division courses." Another UC administrator noted that the vast majority of university faculty are not involved in policy and governance and thus are not as committed to supporting or opposing any particular reform. The key to involving faculty in transfer initiatives, she believes, is ensuring "buy-in from more people than just the elected few."

As Transfer Task Force members noted, it may also be important to incent faculty to participate in inter-segmental disciplinary discussions through stipends, reduced teaching loads, or by rewarding work on discipline-based inter-segmental commissions in promotion and tenure reviews. As this UC faculty member argues:

“Creative ways of incentivizing and making a broader view of scholarly research would, I think, go a long way toward solving lots of academic problems that various systems encounter.... And until serving on a committee... is viewed, if you will, as a grant or a publication—that would be what we were investing our time in if we weren’t sitting at a roundtable articulating courses—until that kind of thing can happen, we have an uphill climb. Things will get done in California when we faculty can follow a different direction than our research has taken us all these years, and for which we were hired. And when we’re allowed to take that direction without putting our promotions in jeopardy.” (UC faculty)

Of course, the elephant in the room during all discussions about how to involve faculty and others in statewide transfer and articulation reforms was the possibility that specific initiatives would be mandated by the legislature. Some interviewees were quite supportive of this possibility:

“The only way to accomplish [a transfer AA degree] is to just lay down the law. What happened in Florida is that they said ‘you will do this and you will do it by this date.’ And even though that isn’t the way you normally want to conduct business in education, if you’re going to do something that dramatic, it’s just not going to come naturally.” (CCC administrator)

“I know it’s going to sound really weird, because I am a faculty member, to say that we need to take the faculty out [of the process], but it seems to me that you would have to have a fully-articulated transfer program that exists statewide, and at a certain level it might have to be put on from above. Where if student X takes this course of study at a community college and successfully completes it, that student is fully qualified to transfer to either UC or CSU. And those credits in that program will move in this way.” (UC faculty)

Other Task Force members strongly opposed using legislation to accomplish transfer or articulation reforms, citing the likelihood of faculty insurrection, or the possibility that the reforms would be poorly implemented, if at all:

“If a statewide GE curriculum were mandated by the legislature I don’t think it would work. I think there would be so much insurrection from the faculty at the UC, CSU, community college campuses that it simply wouldn’t work. There would be too many protests.” (CSU administrator)

“If you get too far into the faculty territory [via legislative mandates], if you get the unions riled up and the unions oppose it, that’s a pretty serious opposition, because they all contribute to legislative campaign coffers.” (CCC administrator)

One thing most interviewees agreed on, however, was that the likelihood of legislation mandating specific transfer and articulation reforms is very high, especially given the support among outside constituent groups such as MALDEF for Assembly Bill 440. Indeed, legislating systemic transfer and articulation reform—in particular, transfer associate degrees—may be the only way to ensure that such initiatives are implemented in a timely and efficient manner. Furthermore, codifying transfer associate degrees in the California Education Code may be necessary to ensure their ongoing support and maintenance. To be most effective, the legislation should clearly spell out the expected outcomes (including the development of a common GE and major areas of emphasis, as well as guarantees for students who complete the degrees) and provide a definitive timeframe for completion, with intermittent reports to the Assembly and Senate education committees.

It is essential, however, that CCC, CSU, and UC faculty be given the opportunity to make all curricular and articulation decisions related to implementation of transfer associate degrees. Furthermore, faculty should be fairly compensated for their time, either through stipends, release time, or by rewarding such

work in promotion and tenure reviews. If discipline-based inter-segmental groups of faculty are unable to reach consensus about a particular action item within a specified amount of time, however, there should be a process in place whereby the decision would then go to campus deans, provosts, and ultimately system leaders to ensure that steady progress is made toward end goals. Louisiana's recent experience in developing a statewide GE curriculum for its transfer associate degree has shown that faculty motivation to retain control over curricular and articulation decisions will ultimately trump their reluctance to engage in such discussions and reach consensus.

### *Un-Common Academic Calendars*

The Transfer Task Force's 2009 report recommended that senior leadership within each system "consider the benefits of a common academic calendar" (p. 8) in recognition of the fact that students experience a variety of problems in attempting to transfer between colleges with different academic schedules. Interviews with task force members reinforced the notion that un-common calendars among California's college and universities is problematic: "I think there is a lot of compelling information out there that coming to a common calendar would certainly be helpful for transfer students, and there's a lot of folks here who are interested in that. The problem is that it is very expensive to go from our current system to a new system, particularly at a time when we have no money." (UC administrator)

**Possible Solutions:** The likely first step toward a statewide common academic calendar is examining the costs, benefits, and drawbacks of such a move. These conversations have already been occurring at the UC and CSU systems, and resistance among faculty and staff may not be as strong as some might think. Indeed, as UC administrator pointed out, "UCLA had a big report recently, and concluded that they weren't going to change, it was too big a bother. But—I can't remember if it was UCLA or UC Santa Barbara—they actually had a poll of faculty asking which they would prefer, and... I'm told it was 55% to 45% in favor of quarters. So [a change] is not so utterly unthinkable."

Changing the 20 CCC, CSU, and UC campuses currently operating on quarters to semester systems would no doubt require resources, both monetary and human. However, the cost savings resulting from a switch to semesters may be significant and could be used to encourage reluctant faculty and staff to revise course syllabi and departmental and institutional procedures. As one UC administrator argued:

"I think if individual faculty could see where savings, for example, from the administrative side, having registration four times a year versus twice. If they could see the cost savings in terms of workload to realize the benefit of smaller classes, or even more classes and not having to lay off faculty, I think that might be enough incentive to say that we ought to look at this."

We recommend that the leadership of the three systems—if they haven't already—engage in a comprehensive cost-benefit analysis of moving to common academic calendars, and widely share the results of those studies with faculty and staff at each of their campuses operating on quarter systems, as well as the general public.

## *Underprepared Community College Students*

Interviews with community college representatives on the Transfer Task Force reinforced the notion that if California is to significantly increase the number of students utilizing the transfer path to the baccalaureate, educators and policymakers must also work to solve another entrenched problem: the vast number of underprepared students matriculating at community colleges. As one CCC administrator pointed out, “You know, when we talk about seamless transfer, it’s got to start back at that grade level. When students get to the community colleges—it varies a bit by college, but not by much—you can easily say that 80% are not prepared for college-level work. And you wonder why they don’t persist. They don’t want to spend 8 years getting a bachelor’s degree! So it begins with a better articulation agreement at the high school level, moving into the community colleges, and then transfer to the four-years.”

**Possible Solutions:** Efforts to increase student preparation and align high school and college curricula abound, both on individual campuses and across the state. One systemic reform that has potential to lessen the need for remediation at the college level is greater use of the Early Assessment Program (EAP), which was developed by the CSU in cooperation with the California Department of Education and State Board of Education, and which is just starting to be implemented at the community colleges. By informing students of their level of college readiness during their junior year of high school, and then assisting them in addressing their subject deficiencies before graduation, the EAP program will lead to productive discussions about high school and college standards, as well as greater curricular alignment between K-12 and higher education, ultimately making the transition easier for students and increasing the transfer population at community colleges. We strongly support the implementation and expansion of the EAP program throughout the state. However, if each postsecondary segment approaches the EAP separately and does not communicate information about validity studies, student performance after matriculation, and best practices, this reform will not reach its potential. EAP must be approached in an inter-segmental manner if it is to substantially improve student preparation across the state.

The Campaign for College Opportunity (Gill, 2009) has proposed another systemic reform to the remediation problem: encouraging community colleges to implement common assessment and placement tools for incoming students. Currently, each of California’s 112 community college campuses utilizes their own combination of external and homegrown assessment instruments. The result is that a student who was advised into remedial English coursework at one institution may qualify for college-level English at another community college, and if he or she wanted to take a course at a third institution (a common practice among community college students), they may be forced to take that college’s placement exam as well. If all of California’s community colleges were to adopt common assessment and placement tools—perhaps mirroring those in place at the CSU—students would receive clear, consistent, and comprehensive information about the skills they must obtain before moving into college-level courses, and would be able to complete their remedial sequences at multiple institutions without loss of credits or having to take additional exams.

CSCC is supportive of all efforts to reduce the need for community college remediation, including those discussed above. However, we caution lawmakers and educators not to conflate the dilemma of underprepared students with the transfer problem; community college remediation is a substantial issue in California and across the country, and although there are several important efforts underway to improve the situation, none is likely to prove effective quickly or across the board. Educators and



lawmakers must engage in critical transfer and articulation reforms now instead of relying on a lesser need for remediation to increase the transfer population on its own. Furthermore, if California is to fully realize the benefits of aligning high school and college standards, a robust and transparent transfer and articulation pathway must await those students who, in the past, may have dismissed their baccalaureate aspirations after learning that they would have to repeat much of their high school coursework in college.

### *University Capacity*

In discussions about the challenges in enacting systemic transfer and articulation reforms, the issue of university capacity arose again and again. As one CCC administrator argued: “One single issue that would help [improve transfer] is simply increasing the number of transfer slots available to students.” Other interviewees, UC administrators in particular, expressed fears that by enacting the type of transfer reforms discussed in this report, capacity problems at UC and CSU would worsen, ultimately leaving transfer students “all dressed up with nowhere to go”:

“If in fact we can improve transfer, and make the transfer system more efficient, are we going to be able to accommodate all of these students” That’s a really important question... if we are successful in making important changes, the day may well come that we have way too many transfers to accommodate, and then what are we going to do?” (UC administrator)

One UC administrator had a slightly different take on the capacity problem. As she stated, “You know, I hope we have [a capacity] problem! I know folks have said that if we do all these wonderful transfer solutions that we will have so many capacity problems that we won’t be able to admit any freshmen students. And I’m saying, well, let’s get to that problem! I am very optimistic, and I have a great belief in our ability to improve the whole transfer process.”

**Possible Solutions:** The state’s current budget crisis has already caused California’s colleges and universities to limit their enrollment, and until the fiscal situation improves and/or the legislature finds a way to fund all higher education enrollments, capacity will remain an issue in the future. However, as several Task Force members noted, there may be other ways of resolving the state’s higher education capacity problem. One is greater utilization of distance learning. Although hybrid and online courses are already pervasive throughout the CCC system, they have yet to be embraced widely by the four-year universities, despite their potential for increasing bachelor’s degree attainment. In the words of one UC administrator:

“The single most important strategy for broadening BA access, however, is to develop hybrid and fully online BA programs at UC, UC Extension, and CSU. Only such approaches have the potential to *increase dramatically* the numbers of BAs produced in California, assuming that is the goal. Only such approaches have the potential to *reduce dramatically* the costs of attaining a degree, assuming no revolution in state politics and priorities. Only such an approach can fully address the special family, community, linguistic, and economic circumstances facing many target populations.”

Other potential solutions to the capacity problem, as identified by several Task Force members, include revising the Master Plan to allow community colleges to confer baccalaureate degrees in limited technical or applied areas, or encouraging UC and CSU faculty to offer upper-division courses on community college campuses. Community colleges are approved to offer the BA in at least 14 other states, and community college baccalaureates and/or university co-location are being proposed as

strategies to resolve capacity and bachelor's degree attainment issues in several others. A UC faculty member describes how these solutions might affect California's current and future capacity problems:

"Quite honestly one of the best things that California could do would be to allow the baccalaureate at community colleges. If—this is my interpretation, although I think there are other scholars and practitioners who share it—but if transfer is one of the main goals for community colleges, the only reason we care about transfer is for baccalaureate attainment. Ultimately, it's not about transfer, it's about baccalaureate attainment. So if we're looking to increase baccalaureate attainment in California, then I think we need to let the community college locations in the state be a location for baccalaureate attainment.... And that in itself might help a fair amount of the capacity stuff.... If you're looking to increase baccalaureate attainment, then increasing the number of venues where the baccalaureate is available, it seems to me, would be one way of doing that."

In addition more widely implementing hybrid and fully online programs, co-locating university centers on community college campuses, and authorizing community colleges to confer the baccalaureate in certain applied fields, Task Force members identified several other possible solutions to the capacity problem, including creating part-time options for upper division completion, and making underpopulated UC and CSU campuses more attractive to transferees through financial incentives and other tools. We support all of these ideas, and recommend that policymakers and system leaders work together to implement—and fund—these or other solutions to current and future capacity problems. Regardless of the specific ways in which capacity issues are addressed now and in years to come, it is imperative that they not be used as justification to forgo or postpone systemic transfer and articulation reforms. Doing so would jeopardize the educational achievements of numerous current and future transfer students, and would significantly harm California's ability to produce enough bachelor's degrees to power the state's workforce.

### *The Master Plan and Lack of Statewide Coordination*

Reforming California's Master Plan will be necessary if the state were to implement community college baccalaureate degrees, but according to some Transfer Task Force members, revising the Master Plan may be just as necessary if the state hopes to significantly strengthen transfer and baccalaureate production. In particular, revising the Master Plan to reform the California Postsecondary Education Commission (CPEC) or replace it with a central coordinating body that has the power and authority to lead inter-segmental initiatives may be an essential step in improving the transfer path to the baccalaureate.

**Possible Solutions:** Conversations about updating or reforming the Master Plan are already underway. In January 2010 California's Legislative Analyst released the latest in a series of reports on the Master Plan, recommending that the legislature adopt a "clear public agenda for higher education, with specific statewide goals... strengthen several critical mechanisms of coordination, including funding formulas, delineated missions, eligibility standards and enrollment pools, articulation and transfer mechanisms... and reform the California Postsecondary Education Commission or replace it with a new coordinating body to help create higher education policy leadership for California" (pp. 3-4). As well, the Joint Committee for the Future of the Master Plan on Higher Education has been holding hearings on topics related to the Master Plan, including eligibility and access, affordability and financing, accountability and quality, and coordination and efficiency.

We support a fundamental reexamination of the Master Plan for Higher Education, and hope that the legislature is able to preserve the spirit of the 1960 Master Plan while revising the details to provide a more current and effective structure for meeting the needs of California and its students. In particular, we suggest that the Joint Committee support the implementation of systemic transfer and articulation reforms such as transfer associate degrees and explore the possibilities of constructing university centers on some community college campuses or authorizing certain community colleges to offer limited baccalaureates in applied, high-demand fields. Moreover, it is essential that a revised Master Plan reforms or replaces CPEC so that California can benefit from a true statewide coordinating body that has the power and authority to coordinate joint initiatives such as shared messaging and financial aid campaigns, as well as the development of a statewide online academic planning tool linked to a Next Generation ASSIST.

### *Lack of Funding*

Lurking in the shadows of all of the other challenges to enacting systemic transfer and articulation reform is the fact that California is in a prolonged recession and institutions of higher education are facing significant and ongoing budget cuts. Indeed, the state's dismal fiscal outlook is what led the Transfer Task Force to limit the recommendations contained in its interim report to a set of low-cost, immediately feasible options, and can has the potential to derail any future transfer and articulation initiatives.

**Possible Solutions:** Clearly, embarking on systemic reforms to California's transfer and articulation process is daunting in an era of budget cutbacks and fiscal uncertainty. However, if the state waits to enact some of these systemic reforms until California's budget crisis has passed and state coffers are once again brimming, we may have missed a critical window in which CCC, CSU, and UC faculty and staff are supportive of (or at least more open to) greater standardization of lower-division coursework in ways that will improve and increase transfer without significant loss of quality or control over the curriculum. Furthermore, the state will have fallen further behind in producing the number of baccalaureate degrees necessary to power the workforce and ensure California's economic health, and many aspiring students will have fallen through the cracks.

Thus, finding the funds to implement the systemic reforms discussed in this report is imperative. The first step may be to draw up estimates for what the development and implementation of transfer associate degrees—including discipline-based inter-segmental faculty commissions to discuss common lower-division major preparation pathways and GE requirements—is likely to cost, keeping in mind that it may be possible to accomplish some project objectives in an inexpensive manner (for example, holding disciplinary meetings via teleconference rather than in person). It would also be valuable to create estimates for designing and implementing a statewide online academic planning system linked to the Next Generation ASSIST, as well as the costs involved in engaging in shared messaging and financial aid campaigns. All cost estimates should be analyzed in conjunction with reports about the benefits and cost savings that may occur as a result of these systemic reforms.

The next step, assuming California's legislature cannot or will not dedicate funding to systemic transfer and articulation initiatives, will be to identify alternative sources of funding for such projects. The recently passed Health Care and Education Reconciliation Act includes \$2 billion over four years for community colleges and other institutions to provide education and training for displaced or unemployed workers. It is possible that some of these dollars may be used to support statewide transfer

and articulation reforms; according to The White House (2010), these competitive grants will support, among other priorities, education partnerships that “expand course offerings and promote the transfer of credit among colleges” (p. 1).

Systemic transfer and articulation reform as a means to greater baccalaureate production is also at the top of many charitable foundations’ priority lists. However, several foundations that had previously invested heavily in California education projects are now reallocating their resources toward states where systemic change is—in their minds—more likely, and where policymakers and educators have fewer entrenched interests. This disinvestment in California is also apparent at the federal level; as an example, California was recently excluded from the first round of Race to the Top funds for failure to demonstrate statewide buy-in for comprehensive K-12 reforms. In sum, funding to support systemic reforms to California’s transfer and articulation process exists, but if the state is to have any chance of obtaining it, legislators, system leaders, and faculty groups must demonstrate a significant commitment to fundamentally altering the structures, attitudes, and policies that have thus far precluded significant reform.

## Next Steps for California

Since the establishment of the 1960 Master Plan for Higher Education, California has been at the forefront of progressive higher education policy and practice, and because of its commitment to open access and system fluidity, the state has more than once been recognized as the most successful model for postsecondary education and training in the country. Unfortunately, due to many years of underfunding, a less-relevant Master Plan, competition among systems, and battles over curricular territory, California's system of higher education is no longer recognized as the best or most influential. Indeed, we are witnessing a slow but steady disinvestment in California public education by the federal government and philanthropic foundations, reportedly due to beliefs that the state's problems are too entrenched and that there is not a significant desire—on the part of legislators or educators—to engage in significant systemic reforms.

It is not too late to reverse this trend. Indeed, our current fiscal circumstances provide California with an incredible opportunity to reclaim its title of the best and most accessible higher education system in the country. However, doing so will require: A) acknowledging that we have not and are not living up to the spirit of the Master Plan, which envisioned a clear path to any postsecondary degree or certificate for all California students; and B) making a serious commitment to implementing systemic transfer and articulation reforms, such as transfer associate degrees, that will make the transfer path to the baccalaureate more viable, transparent, and effective for all students.

The first step in this process must be to ensure that any legislation authorizing the development of transfer associate degrees includes a guarantee that if students complete such a degree, they will be admitted to a public university in the state, and their units will satisfy all lower-division GE requirements and be applied toward their major. The second step may be to reconvene the Community College Transfer Task Force or a similar group to oversee the implementation of transfer associate degrees, a statewide online academic planning tool, and/or other systemic reforms. The Task Force must have the power to assemble inter-segmental faculty and staff commissions, and the authority to impose commission objectives and timelines. A primary initial goal of the Task Force might be to help the Inter-Segmental Committee of Academic Senates (ICAS) and the individual systems' academic senates understand the importance and timeliness of such initiatives, and to ensure their support.

## Next Steps for our Project

The next step for our project is to gather information from other states that can assist California in successfully implementing transfer associate degrees, a statewide online academic planning tool, and/or other statewide transfer and articulation reforms. In the next phase of our study we will visit 3 states that have successfully implemented these initiatives (most likely Florida, Arizona, and Oregon), identify the political processes, actors, and associations that were instrumental in bringing about the reforms, and describe implementation strategies that may be successfully utilized in California. We will also be asking how states funded the development of transfer associate degrees and other statewide reforms, and will be examining the effects of such initiatives on curricular quality and student success. We expect to complete this phase of our project and report back to legislators and UC, CSU, and CCC leaders by January 2011.

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## About the Center for the Study of Community Colleges

The Center for the Study of California Community Colleges was established by Arthur Cohen, John Lombardi, and Florence Brawer in 1974 in order to conduct original research pertaining to community college policy and practice. Previous Center projects have received support from the Ford Foundation, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, the National Science Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Humanities, among others.

The Center's current board of directors includes Carrie Kisker, education research and policy consultant, Richard Wagoner, assistant professor of higher education at UCLA, James Palmer, professor of higher education at Illinois State University, and Trudy Bers, executive director of research, curriculum, and planning at Oakton Community College.

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