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Evolving Statewide Transfer Policies: Persistent Efforts in Tension with Workforce Development among Massachusetts Community Colleges

Daniel de la Torre, Jr.

Quinsigamond Community College



Ryan S. Wells

University of Massachusetts Amherst

USA

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Abstract: Since their inception, community colleges have included the transfer function as a central mission. However, arguments have been made contending that community colleges have systematically diverted students toward occupational education. In the 21st century, community colleges continue to contend with multiple missions and identities, especially when viewed from a workforce-development perspective stressing short-term employability as the primary objective. The two-fold purpose of this study focuses on the academic transfer mission of community colleges in tension with the vocational-occupational mission. We apply document and thematic analysis to identify the elements of formal transfer and articulation policies in the United States leading into the 21st century. Using these results as a framework for comparison, we draw on Massachusetts as a case study to explore how transfer and articulation policies have resembled and/or diverged from the policy elements we isolate. Findings address transfer policy in the context of competing community college missions, both nationally and within

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Massachusetts. Implications for future policy formation point to the need for bridging the tension between transfer and occupational missions through the adoption of a) policies advocating explicit transfer opportunities for community college students enrolled in occupational programs, b) the use of stackable credentials to support community college students initially pursuing technical preparation for employment on the way towards subsequent academic advancement, and c) state-specific analysis of transfer policies, applying a framework similar to the one used in this study, to better understand how particular strengths and limitations influence policy reform within the context of state-determined higher education priorities.

Keywords: community colleges; transfer; articulation policy; occupational education; document analysis; public higher education; Massachusetts.

La evolución de las políticas de transferencia estatales: Esfuerzos persistentes en tensión con el desarrollo de fuerza laboral en las universidades comunitarias de Massachusetts.

Resumen: Desde su creación, las universidades comunitarias han incluido la función de transferencia como una misión central. Sin embargo críticas se han hecho sobre que los colegios comunitarios han desviado sistemáticamente a los estudiantes hacia la educación ocupacional. En el siglo 21, las universidades comunitarias continúan lidiando con múltiples misiones e identidades, sobre todo cuando se ve desde la perspectiva de desarrollo de la fuerza laboral haciendo hincapié en la empleabilidad a corto plazo. El doble objetivo de este estudio se centra en la misión de transferencia académica de las universidades comunitarias en tensión con la misión de desarrollo profesional-ocupacional. Aplicamos análisis documental y temático para identificar los elementos de las políticas de transferencia y articulación formal en los Estados Unidos. Utilizando estos resultados como un marco para la comparación, nos basamos en Massachusetts como un estudio de caso para explorar cómo las políticas de transferencia y articulación se parecen y/o difieren de los elementos de la política nacional. Las conclusiones abordan la política de transferencia en el contexto de las contradicciones entre las misiones de las universidades comunitarias, tanto a nivel nacional como dentro de Massachusetts. Implicaciones para el futuro desde el punto de formación de políticas para reducir la tensión entre las misiones de transferencia y formación laboral mediante la adopción de políticas que defienden a) las oportunidades de transferencia explícitas para los estudiantes de universidades comunitarias inscritos en programas de formación laboral, b) el uso de credenciales apilables para apoyar a los estudiantes de universidades comunitarias que quieran inicialmente una preparación técnica para luego poder hacer un avance académico posterior, y c) el análisis específico del estado de las políticas de transferencia, la aplicación de un marco similar al que se utiliza en este estudio, para entender mejor cómo las fortalezas y limitaciones de la reforma de políticas para la educación superior estatal,

Palabras clave: universidades comunitarias; transferencia; articulación de políticas; educación laboral; análisis de documentos; educación superior pública; Massachusetts.

A evolução das política de transferência estaduais: os esforços persistentes em tensão com o desenvolvimento da força de trabalho em faculdades comunitárias têm Massachusetts.

Resumo: Desde a sua criação, as faculdades comunitárias têm incluído a função de transferência como uma missão central. No entanto críticas têm sido feitas sobre que as faculdades comunitárias têm sistematicamente encaminhado os estudantes para a educação profissional. No século 21, as faculdades comunitárias continuam a lidar com múltiplas missões e identidades,

especialmente a perspectiva de desenvolvimento da força de trabalho, com ênfase na empregabilidade de curto prazo. O duplo objetivo deste estudo centra-se na missão acadêmica da transferência de faculdades comunitárias em tensão com a missão de desenvolvimento vocacional –ocupacional. Nós aplicamos análise documental e temática para identificar os elementos de políticas de transferência e articulação formal nos Estados Unidos. Usando estes resultados como um quadro de comparação, nos baseamos em Massachusetts como um estudo de caso para explorar como as políticas de transferência e articulação assemelham e/ou diferem dos elementos da política nacional. Os resultados abordam a política de transferência no contexto das contradições entrar nas missões de faculdades comunitárias , tanto a nível nacional e em Massachusetts. Implicações para o futuro, do ponto de formação de políticas para reduzir a tensão entre as missões de transferência e capacitação para o trabalho, adotando políticas que defendem a) oportunidades de transferência explícita para estudantes universitários matriculados em programas comunitários de formação profissional, b) o uso de credenciais empilháveis para apoiar os estudantes de faculdades comunitárias que querem formação técnica inicialmente e depois mais tarde fazer progressos acadêmico, e c) a análise específica de políticas de transferência de estado, a implementação de um quadro semelhante ao utilizado neste estudo para entender melhor como os pontos fortes e as limitações das reformas políticas dentro de um contexto de prioridades de ensino superior estadual.

Palavras-chave: faculdades comunitárias; transferências; políticas conjuntas; educação para o trabalho; análise de documentos; ensino superior público; Massachusetts.

Introduction

Since their inception, community colleges have included the transfer function as a central mission (Cohen & Brawer, 1987), which has served to validate and provide for academic pathways from two-year to four-year colleges and universities. However, throughout the history of the community college movement arguments have been made contending that these institutions have systematically diverted students toward occupational education (Brint & Karabel, 1989) and served to “cool out” students’ expectations for bachelor’s degrees (Clark, 1960, 1980). Using this enduring tension as a backdrop for the analysis, the purpose of this study is to assess the academic transfer policies of community colleges in two stages. First, we provide a broad, descriptive summary of transfer and articulation policy elements synthesized from national literature on community college transfer as the system entered the 21st century. Second, we historically analyze Massachusetts’ articulation and transfer policies in direct relation to the elements that we identify from the national literature.

We focus on Massachusetts because Brint and Karabel (1989) spotlighted the state as an example of the persistent development of occupational education interests from the 1960s through the 1980s. It is especially fitting to compare the Massachusetts approach to transfer policy development because, from the early 1970s through the first decade of this century, the state’s public colleges and universities incrementally accumulated transfer and articulation policies to create pathways to four-year institutions for community college students. An analysis of the Massachusetts case historically complicates and serves to counter Brint and Karabel’s (1989) thesis of diverting students from transferring to four-year institutions and adds nuance concerning the competing missions of community colleges. In relation to recent national trends, this state-level analysis demonstrates how transfer and articulation policies have developed into the 21st century even as the occupational discourse about, and demands on, community colleges have continued to evolve.

Our findings shed light on the development of state transfer policies a) as compared to broader national policy trends, and b) in a climate where the transfer mission is in continual tension with the workforce development mission of community colleges. This analysis is intended to provide a framework for considering the current and future development of state-specific transfer policies. To achieve these aims, this study is designed to address four questions. At the national level, 1) what are elements of transfer and articulation policies identified by researchers and scholars? For the case of Massachusetts, 2) what are the elements of transfer and articulation policies? and 3) how have these policies changed over time? Finally, d) how do Massachusetts' policies compare and contrast with the elements identified at the national level?

The Transfer Function in the Context of Multiple Missions

In their seminal treatise examining the origins and development of the community college system, Brint and Karabel (1989) chronicled large-scale initiatives and policy trends that followed the growth of these institutions up to the 1980s. The authors documented the historical rise of the community college in the United States, but challenged earlier preconceptions and assumptions about the purposes of the institutions and the motivations for their development. They demonstrated how vocational education dominated the discourse about community college education, even though most of the students attending these schools desired education that would allow them to transfer to four-year institutions. The authors challenged assumptions about high student demand for vocational-career programs (a consumer demand model), as well as the notion that business interests were behind this dominant emphasis. They instead argued that the institutions, heavily influenced by key leaders, were mainly responsible for this dominant discourse in an effort to define a unique niche and protect individual interests. Brint and Karabel were among the first scholars to highlight the degree to which community colleges' multiple missions were in tension, ultimately concluding that the continued push for a vocationally oriented system diverted many students from their dreams of transfer.

Other scholars have indirectly reinforced Brint and Karabel's contentions as they point out the increased attention to college access and skill development (and consequently diminished numbers of transfer students) through the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s (e.g., Barkley, 1993; Lombardi, 1992; Mosholder & Zirkle, 2007). Taken together, the trend away from transfer even led one researcher to question whether the transfer function might disappear altogether (Lombardi, 1992). Past concerns over decreased attention to the transfer function (Cohen & Brawer, 1987; Dougherty, 1994; Lombardi, 1992), coupled with a return to a workforce training emphasis, appear to have placed baccalaureate transfer in a somewhat precarious situation at the turn of the century.

In the 21st century, community colleges continue to contend with multiple, perhaps contradictory (Dougherty, 1994), and arguably onerous missions and identities (Cohen & Brawer, 2005). The diversionary discourse of cooling out continues to carry a lot of weight, especially when viewed from a workforce-development perspective stressing short-term employability as the primary community college objective. At the federal level, President Obama has revived attention on community colleges, most notably through legislation intended to increase workforce training opportunities (Lewin, 2012; Smith, Miller & Bermeo, 2009). Similarly, in states from California to Massachusetts, the call for greater ties between community college systems and local business interests have grown and gained support as we enter the second decade of the century (Alssid, Goldberg, & Schneider, 2011; Blumenstyk, 2012).

Despite persistent attention to occupational and vocational education, community college students have steadfastly maintained interest in transfer opportunities (Boswell, 2004; Brint &

Karabel, 1989; Hungar, 2001; Nora & Rendon, 1990). Moreover, there is recent evidence suggesting that community colleges may actually be more likely to warm up, rather than cool out, students' expectations, thereby encouraging transfer (Rosenbaum, Deil-Amen & Person, 2009). The enduring commitment to transfer has also been periodically bolstered by scholars and policymakers emphasizing articulation policy reform as a response to a perceived diminution of the transfer role (Dougherty, 1994; Ignash & Townsend, 2001; Knoell, 1990). These efforts to examine and elevate structural articulation policies have reinforced the belief that promoting student movement from community colleges to baccalaureate institutions is worthy of continued attention and support (Kintzer, 1996; Knoell, 1990; Sauer, Jackson, Hazelgrove, Scott, & Ignash, 2005; Wellman, 2002). We examine such formal transfer policies for the specific case of Massachusetts.

The Case of Massachusetts

Massachusetts higher education is dominated by elite and private academic traditions. In this context, public higher education is relatively young and perceived as less prestigious (Hogarty, 2002). The recognized three-tiered public higher education system – a) community colleges, b) state universities, and c) University of Massachusetts (UMass) campuses – slowly took hold in the decades following the emergence of the state community colleges in the early 1960s. For the remainder of the 20th century, the three segments continued to develop with relative independence, a process that influenced the development of statewide transfer policies.

As the Massachusetts public higher education system continued to expand over the last 40 years, so too has student enrollment. In the last decade, enrollments of first-time undergraduate students have risen across all three segments (see Figure 1). Additionally, between 2002 and 2008 the community college sector served the greatest proportion of college students in public institutions (Massachusetts Department of Higher Education [MDHE], 2009). This trend mirrors fall headcount credit enrollment growth in community colleges nationally (Figure 2, as cited in Phillippe & Mullin, 2011). According to the most recent MDHE Performance Measurement Report (2010), the state's community colleges experienced a 22% increase in fall headcount enrollment between 2005 and 2009. The same report indicates that, in 2009, tuition and fees at Massachusetts community colleges, measured as a percentage of median household income, remained below the Northeast average of 5% for comparable two-year institutions (MDHE, 2010).

While the growth in community colleges may be driven by open access and low tuition and/or changing economic conditions, community college students who choose to continue at a state university or UMass campus encounter varying requirements, procedures, and standards including: programmatic accreditation and major-specific prerequisites; distinct transfer admissions protocols; institution-specific general education requirements; and uneven and often unknown course equivalencies, course numbers, and course titles.

These concerns take on special significance as increasing numbers of community college students look to the public four-year sector to continue their educational pursuits. According to the Commonwealth Transfer Advisory Group report (MDHE, 2008) commissioned as part of statewide transfer policy review, 40% of new undergraduate degree-seeking transfer students enrolled in Fall 2006 at UMass campuses were from Massachusetts community colleges. In that same year, community college students made up 45% of all new undergraduate degree-seeking transfer students at Massachusetts state universities (then state colleges). By 2009, the majority (53%) of new undergraduate degree-seeking transfer students at Massachusetts state universities were from community colleges (MDHE, 2010).

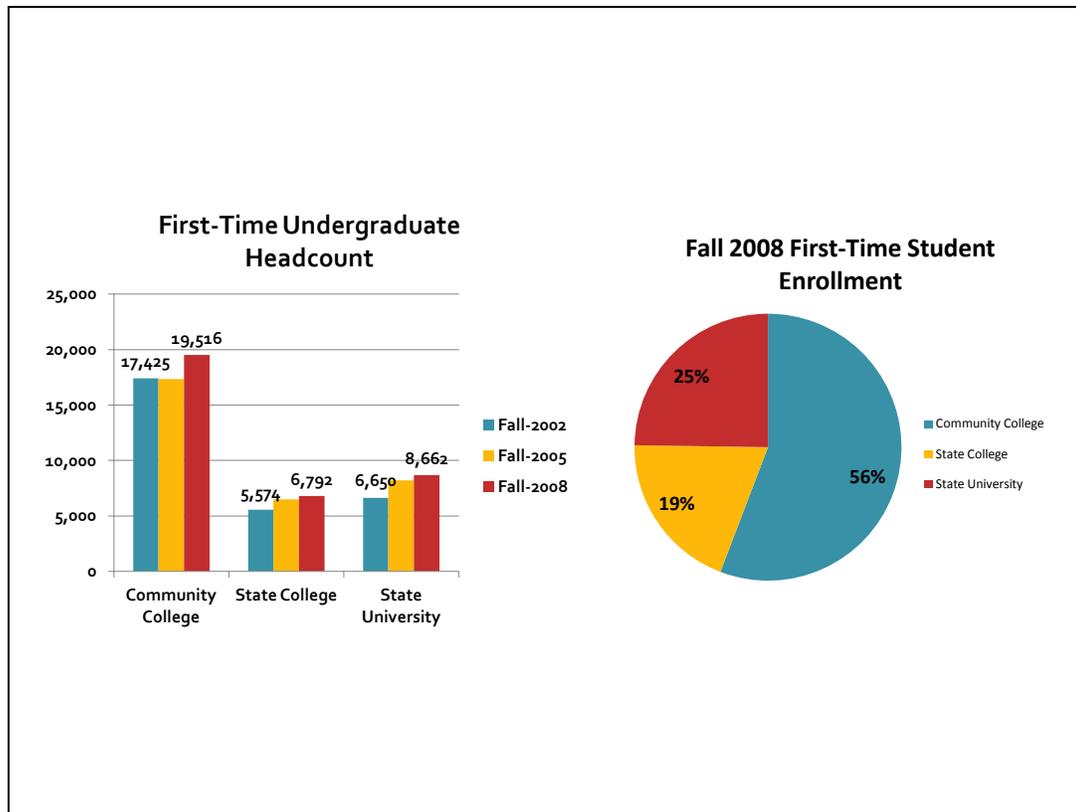


Figure 1. Fall 2002-2008 First-Time, Degree-Seeking Undergraduate Enrollment by Segment in Massachusetts

Source: First time student enrollment 2002-2008, Massachusetts Department of Higher Education, 2009.

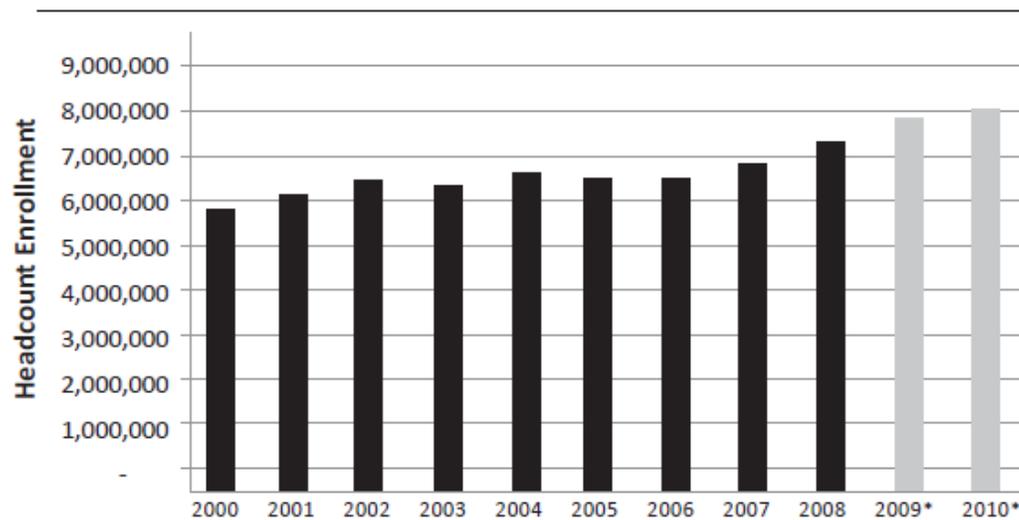


Figure 2. Fall headcount credit enrollment in U.S. community colleges: 2000-2010

Source: Phillippe, K. & Mullin, C. M. (2011). *Community college estimated growth: Fall 2010*. Washington, D.C.: American Association of Community Colleges.

Given the steady growth of the community college sector in Massachusetts and the substantial percentage of community college students who transfer to four-year institutions within

the public higher education system, the impact of transfer policies on the capacity for large numbers of college students to move seamlessly toward baccalaureate degrees cannot be underestimated. Transfer mobility within the state higher education system is a long-standing issue, as the inventory of academic transfer policies presented later makes clear.

Despite the evidence of sustained development of the transfer function, Massachusetts has not been immune to the emphasis of community colleges as primarily workforce development institutions. Brint and Karabel's (1989) case study of Massachusetts community colleges overlaps chronologically with the beginning of our state-level analysis (1974), providing an interesting connection and basis for comparison. Our new analysis is timely as well since, over the last few years, local business interests have again rallied around better alignment between community college programs and business needs (Alssid, Goldberg, & Schneider, 2011). In addition, Massachusetts Governor Deval Patrick has been receptive to this argument as evidenced by his legislative proposals to bring the community college system in greater alignment with workforce training goals (Ring, 2012).

Methods

Methodological perspectives

This study is informed by two qualitative research approaches: case study and historical research. The case study approach (Stake, 1994) is a form of inquiry that is bounded and has a particular context (for our study, Massachusetts from 1974 to 2011), highlights a specific phenomenon (transfer policies), and may lend itself to comparison (with the national articulation literature). Because the context is bounded by time, in the sense that guidelines for transfer in Massachusetts were developed and promulgated over approximately four decades, a historical approach helps to understand the continuity and change in the various policies. Similarly, the use of this approach provides structure for identifying the core documents as primary sources upon which interpretation and narration are based (Tuchman, 1994).

Analytic Methods

We first employ document analysis as it provides both a rationale for the attention to written policy records as well as a technique for reviewing and interpreting documents (Bowen, 2009). In this approach, written texts are repeatedly read for thoroughness before being broken down into themes. Similarly, narrative and template analysis are used to detect and make connections among the policy elements we identified. Described by Manning and Cullum-Swan (1994) as "loosely formulated, almost intuitive, using terms defined by the analyst" (p. 465), we utilize a "top down" narrative analysis approach.

Features of template analysis assist us in identifying themes from the literature sources as well as from the Massachusetts transfer policy documents. Similar to narrative analysis in its flexible and inclusive procedural approach (King, 2004), template analysis can be used to develop themes that are clustered and grouped into successively larger conceptual sets. King (2004) describes traditional template analysis as using codes to label text in relation to themes or issues identified as relevant to the document under analysis (p. 257). We adapted King's coding practices to identify policy elements in the literature. We also relied on contextual cues (Hodder, 1994) - in this case, specific policy discussion and analysis - to interpret and confirm relevance to transfer issues.

We applied these analytic strategies by, first, examining recent national literature for evidence of articulation and transfer policy terms, which were aggregated into an overall list of policy elements at the national level. Consistent with narrative analysis, as successive documents were

examined, incidences of similar policy terms, as well as additional ones related to recommendations or priorities, were added. It should be acknowledged that the researchers' experience and familiarity with transfer policy undoubtedly assisted with identification of facets in the literature, but may also be a source of researcher bias and could have influenced the coding process.

Articulation Policy Documents

We used keyword searches in ERIC Clearinghouse, Google Scholar, library databases and online catalogs to locate literature on national transfer policies. We specifically searched for "community college transfer policies" and "transfer articulation policies." Additionally, the process of spider-webbing - reviewing article citations and working backward and outward to additional literature - assisted in identification. Criteria for inclusion in the analytic sample were a) compilations of state articulation policies, b) description of articulation policy components and/or c) comparison of state articulation policies. These criteria were meant to restrict the literature only to those sources that explicitly described policy elements, critiqued aspects of transfer policy, or offered explicit recommendations for policy development. For example, multiple sources were removed from the initial list after determining that central topics and arguments in these documents did not address articulation policies, either as description, criticism, or recommendations. This intentionally narrow search resulted in 22 documents: 12 policy reports, seven research papers, two book chapters, and one magazine article. We acknowledge that our approach is limited in its selection of articulation policy literature; we assume these national-level documents represent accurate and inclusive assessments of transfer policy aspects. Although it is beyond the scope of this study to critique these sources, we recognize that there may be gaps or biases inherent in our choices and we encourage future scrutiny to compare alternative approaches.

The framework of nationally-identified policy elements created from these 22 documents was used to analyze the full array of Massachusetts transfer policies, from the first proclamation in 1974 to the most recent one in 2011. The majority of the policy documents that we use from Massachusetts were available publicly as reference sources to transfer affairs officials in accordance with professional roles. Copies of earlier policies were provided by the MDHE, and the first policy document was located via the UMass-Amherst DuBois Library archive. All Massachusetts transfer policies used in this study are listed in the Appendix.

Findings

Elements of Articulation Policies in the United States

Table 1 contains the articles and reports used in our analysis of national literature and the policy elements that we identified from these sources via document analysis. Table 2 places the identified elements in rank order by frequency in the literature. Each unique policy item was counted once as it came up in a text regardless of multiple references, so that totals reflect single incidences of specific policy features in each article or report. While space limitations do not allow us to explain each identified policy element in detail, many are relatively self-explanatory. Still, where individual elements are mentioned in the remainder of our results, we explain them in more detail.

Table 1

Articulation Policy Elements in the Literature

	AACC & AASCU, 2004 ^a	AASCU, 2005 ^b	Anderson, Sun & Alfonso, 2006	Barkley, 1993	Boswell, 2004	Education Commission of the States, 2001	Gross & Goldhaber, 2009	Hezel, 2009	Hezel, 2010	Hungar, 2001	Ignash & Townsend, 2000
Academics											
Common general education curriculum	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	
Junior status										X	
Statewide transfer guides	X		X	X	X	X	X	X			
Selective majors and technical program articulations					X			X	X	X	
Faculty involvement	X		X	X	X		X			X	X
Enrollment											
Appeals											
Part-time attendance											
Common course numbering	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Financial incentives, aid and scholarships		X	X			X	X	X		X	
Outreach										X	
Admissions guarantees						X	X		X	X	
Transfer of credits							X				
Structural											
Data reporting, monitoring and exchange	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	
Private colleges included							X				X
Oversight and coordination committee				X				X		X	
Web information and degree audits			X	X							
Transfer center								X			
Incentive funding										X	
Legislation			X			X	X				
Statewide articulation agreements		X	X			X	X				

^a American Association of Community Colleges & American Association of State Colleges and Universities

^b American Association of State Colleges and Universities

Table 1 (Cont'd.)

Articulation Policy Elements in the Literature

	Ignash & Townsend, 2001	Knoell, 1990	Moore, Shulock & Jensen, 2009	NCPPE, 2011 ^c	Roksa, 2009	Roksa & Keith, 2008	Smith, Miller, & Bermeo, 2009	Smith, 2010	Southern Regional Ed Board, 2007	Wellman, 2002	Zamani, 2001
Academics											
Common general education curriculum	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Junior status			X	X	X						
Statewide transfer guides					X		X	X	X	X	
Selective majors and technical program articulations	X	X	X				X	X	X	X	X
Faculty involvement	X	X				X	X		X		X
Enrollment											
Appeals		X							X		X
Part-time attendance				X							X
Common course numbering		X		X			X	X	X	X	X
Financial incentives, aid and scholarships		X		X			X	X		X	X
Outreach		X					X				X
Admissions guarantees		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X
Transfer of credits			X		X	X				X	X
Structural											
Data reporting, monitoring and exchange	X	X			X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Private colleges included	X	X			X					X	
Oversight and coordination committee					X				X		X
Web information and degree audits		X	X		X						
Transfer center											X
Incentive funding										X	X
Legislation		X	X		X	X		X	X		X
Statewide articulation agreements		X		X		X	X		X	X	X

^c National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education

Table 2
Summary of Articulation Policy Elements in the Literature

Policy Elements	Number of single incidences per article/report (N = 22)
Academics	
Common general education curriculum	18
Faculty involvement	13
Selective majors and technical program articulations	12
Statewide transfer guides	12
Web information and degree audits	5
Enrollment	
Common course numbering	18
Admissions guarantees	13
Financial incentives, aid and scholarships	12
Transfer of credits	6
Junior status	4
Outreach	4
Appeals	4
Part-time attendance	4
Structural	
Data reporting, monitoring and exchange	18
Statewide articulation agreements	11
Legislation	10
Private colleges included	6
Oversight and coordination committee	6
Incentive funding	3
Transfer center	2

To aid us in this investigation, we grouped policy units into clusters that approximate administrative structures found within higher education institutions. We categorized the emergent thematic groupings in Table 2 as follows: *Academic*, *Enrollment*, and *Structural*. Policy components in the *Academic* category include curricular priorities such as general education coursework and faculty involvement. The *Enrollment* group contains admissions and registrar/records concerns such as transfer of credits and admissions guarantees. *Structural* features stress systemic matters such as data reporting and legislation.

Some policy elements may appear more related to a different category than where listed in Table 2. Given the abbreviated titles used to describe specific policy elements and the potential for particular institutional interpretations of policy features - that is, how the institution's culture influences perceptions - these categories could seem contrived. While recognizing the limitation of including each element in only one category, we do so to keep our analysis, and the reporting of results, more straightforward.

Massachusetts Articulation Policies

Massachusetts transfer policies are summarized in Table 3. The first policy, the Commonwealth Transfer Compact, was formed between UMass-Amherst and area community colleges in 1974; its aim was to identify a common core of general education coursework. Through a certification process, this block of coursework was recognized by the university and deemed comparable to its own general education requirements. One policy limitation was that, while students could be assured of meeting UMass' general education requirements, they were not guaranteed admission. The Commonwealth Transfer Compact was expanded to all public institutions and remained in place until it was superseded by the MassTransfer policy in 2009.

A second transfer policy between UMass-Amherst and area community colleges, Joint Admissions, was established in 1992 to complement the Commonwealth Transfer Compact by providing a guarantee of admission for students who completed designated transfer associate degrees with minimum Grade Point Averages (GPAs) of 2.5. Later expanded across the public higher education system, the Joint Admissions policy has been replaced by the MassTransfer policy. Under MassTransfer, students who complete designated transfer programs and meet the 2.5 GPA performance measure are guaranteed admission, full transfer of coursework and waiver of general education requirements. This last benefit, the waiver of general education requirements, is attainable because eligible associate degrees contain a core of general education coursework in their respective curricula. MassTransfer policy also contains a transitional goal: students who only complete a general education block of coursework prior to transfer can still have core requirements waived at the destination school. These students must, however, meet general transfer admissions standards. One consequence of MassTransfer is that career-oriented associate degrees, including those in healthcare (nursing, dental hygiene and radiology, for example) and STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics), fields often fail to comply with this agreement due to the heavily technical emphases of their curricula.

Comparison of Massachusetts Policies to Elements in National Literature

Academics

The most frequently mentioned policy element in the Academic category nationally, *general education core curriculum*, refers to the common curricular foundation that all enrolled students must complete for the baccalaureate degree. Typically, coursework in composition and quantitative

Table 3
Massachusetts Academic Transfer Policies

Policy	Established	Participants	Provisions
Commonwealth Transfer Compact	1974	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community colleges UMass Amherst 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Completion of associate degree (60 credits) to transfer Completion of 33 credits of general education coursework Transfer students treated equally to native students to complete bachelor degree (“D” grade acceptance)
Revised Commonwealth Transfer Compact	1984	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community colleges State colleges UMass campuses (Amherst, Boston) 	<p>Same provisions as 1974 policy. In addition,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Required minimum 2.0 GPA for eligibility Total transferable credits (60-66) Focus on requirements of associate “Transfer” degrees Expansion to “non-transfer” associate degrees Admission to selective majors Establishment of coordinating committee Designated transfer officer
Revised Commonwealth Transfer Compact	1990	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community colleges State colleges UMass campuses (Amherst, Boston) 	<p>Same provisions as 1984 policy. In addition,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Core coursework refined and clarified for transfer applicability to bachelors requirements Publication of requirements Record sharing Appeals and effective date Implementation guidelines
Joint Admissions	1992-1993	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community colleges UMass Amherst 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Guarantee of admission Required minimum 2.5 GPA for eligibility Required graduation from “transfer program” Enrollment (free) form Transfer students treated equally to native students to complete bachelor degree (“D” grade acceptance) and access to majors 5 year associate degree completion requirement Information sharing Advising and communication Curriculum development and faculty exchange Oversight (including committee) Implementation guidelines

Table 3 (Continued)
Massachusetts Academic Transfer Policies

Policy	Established	Participants	Provisions
Joint Admissions	1995	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community colleges UMass (All undergraduate campuses) 	<p>Same provisions as 1992-1993 policy. In addition,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Specification of enrollment process and requirements at community college (prior to completing 30 credits) Guarantee of junior status with acceptance of 60 credits Introduces Commonwealth Transfer Compact as supplemental to Joint Admissions benefits Recognizes potential eligibility/ineligibility of students who deviate from conditions prescribed above
Joint Admissions	1996	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community colleges State colleges 	<p>Same provisions as 1992-1993 and 1995 policies with UMass.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Includes special mission colleges (Mass Maritime Academy and Mass College of Art) Guarantee of admission to baccalaureate major Adds potential acceptance of students with 2.0-2.49 GPAs.
Tuition Advantage Program	1996-1997	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community colleges State colleges UMass campuses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 33% in-state tuition reduction Required enrollment in Joint Admissions program Required minimum 3.0 GPA Renewable for 4 semesters, 2 years total Implementation guidelines and timeline
Revised Tuition Advantage Program	2002	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community colleges State colleges UMass campuses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eligibility requirements expanded Implementation guidelines added
Education Compact	2004	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community colleges State colleges UMass campuses 	<p>Same provisions as Joint Admissions policy.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus on Early Childhood Education and Elementary Education transfer programs Guarantee of admission Use of Joint Admissions Enrollment (free) form 60 credits to transfer towards bachelor degree Completion of 44-60 credits of specified coursework Required minimum 2.75 GPA Required successful licensure subtest performance

Table 3 (Continued)
Massachusetts Academic Transfer Policies

Policy	Established	Participants	Provisions
Revised Joint Admissions	2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community colleges • State colleges • UMass campuses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enrollment process loosened, timeline extended • Focus on statistical and promotional information-sharing • Clarifies usage of Joint Admissions and Commonwealth Transfer Compact as complementary programs • Guarantee of junior status with acceptance of 60 credits • Reaffirms maximum 68 credits to complete bachelor degree
MassTransfer	2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community colleges • State colleges • UMass campuses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supersedes Commonwealth Transfer Compact and Joint Admissions • Short term provision and benefit <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 34-35 credit block of General Education coursework (MassTransfer block) with minimum 2.0 GPA • Waiver of general education requirements at destination transfer institution • Long term provision and benefit <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completion of approved associate degrees (MassTransfer programs) • At 2.0, free MassTransfer application form and potential waiver of general education requirements • At 2.5, same as above with guarantee of admission and full transfer of credit and waiver of general education requirements • At 3.0, same as above with 33% tuition reduction • Information sharing • Implementation and oversight (including ad hoc subcommittees)
Revised Early Childhood Education Compact	2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community colleges • State colleges • UMass campuses 	<p>Same provisions as earlier Education Compact policy.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of MassTransfer application form • Revised 44-60 credits of specified coursework

reasoning, along with elective work in Humanities, Social/Behavioral Sciences, and Lab Sciences make up the nucleus of this base. This element resonates strongly with the first (Commonwealth Transfer Compact, 1974), and latest (MassTransfer, 2009) Massachusetts transfer policies, which emphasized the creation of a common general education core at community colleges that can be accepted as equivalent to requirements at four-year public institutions. That this provision has remained a policy component for over 35 years speaks to the central concern of requiring students to have some exposure to liberal arts courses within the undergraduate curriculum and is reflected in the literature, as transfer and articulation policies repeatedly point out the fundamental meaning and value of this academic preparation for attainment of the bachelor's degree.

The national literature also mentions *faculty involvement* repeatedly as an important academic element, referring to the important leadership roles played by these individuals, as content area experts, for determining comparability and equivalency of coursework. By contrast, in Massachusetts, the closest that faculty has ever come to being a part of the statewide policies is brief mention of curriculum development and faculty exchange in the original Joint Admissions policy of 1992. Later policies would shift this involvement to "subcommittee" status, with MassTransfer policy including a provision to create a standing subcommittee, "The Subcommittee on Statewide Transfer Alignment," charged with convening faculty exchange on an ad hoc basis (MDHE, 2008). While a structured subcommittee could conceivably be seen as a positive step via a more permanent structure, we interpret this as a downgrade in status for an already limited policy element.

A third important finding relates to the academic policy element focusing on the development of *articulation agreements for selected majors* with unique prerequisite requirements as well as technical associate degrees. These programmatic emphases have been addressed in two distinct ways within Massachusetts transfer policies. The first revision of the Commonwealth Transfer Compact in 1984 mentions the policy of expanding potential benefits to "non-transfer" programs, with senior institutions encouraged to maximize credit transferability. The Revised Commonwealth Transfer Compact policy of 1990 widened transfer pathways by including associate of science degrees as eligible transfer degrees in addition to associate of arts. Furthermore, while the Joint Admissions policy stipulated that eligible students needed to be enrolled in transfer programs, over time traditional career and technical degrees were also designated as approved transfer programs. By 2009, when MassTransfer policy went into effect, career programs in such diverse fields as social services (Developmental Disabilities and Human Services), applied technology (Manufacturing Technology and Telecommunications Technology) and public safety (Fire Science and Law Enforcement/Criminal Justice) had been included (MDHE, 2012). The Education Compact of 2004 was the first instance of a separate agreement for a distinct academic field. This contract was chiefly driven by public education leaders and the Early Childhood Education community who sought increased pathways to teacher licensure programs through community colleges. Due to changing teacher preparation and licensure standards, as well as increased advocacy by the early childhood community, this agreement was revised and updated in 2011.

A final element in the national literature, *statewide transfer guides*, refers to representations that demonstrate alignment of two-year and four-year courses in specific programs or majors. These guides provide concrete information for students to ensure appropriate coursework selection for transferability. The newest Massachusetts transfer policy, MassTransfer, mentions transfer guides only in a limited way, as a possible topic for future discussion and subcommittee attention. It could be that the consistent focus on the general education core may have addressed the need for matching course and program curricula without necessitating formal guides. Another plausible explanation is the notorious independence of public higher education institutions in Massachusetts,

which may have precluded motivation to engage in detailed course-to course and program-to-program guidelines.

Enrollment

Massachusetts transfer policies have addressed two of the top three national enrollment-related policy features: *admissions guarantees* and *financial incentives* (see Table 2). The articulation literature introduces guarantees of admission into baccalaureate institutions for community college students who meet negotiated academic profile requirements including specific cumulative GPAs and completion of pre-approved associate degree curricula. *Financial incentives*, which may include tuition reductions and scholarships, are offered in recognition of community college students who demonstrate persistence and exceptional academic performance. The various versions of the Commonwealth Transfer Compact, from 1974 to 1990, paid increasing attention to meeting curricular and performance requirements in order to facilitate transfer of community college students. However, it was the Joint Admissions program in 1992 that made guarantee of admission a formal and explicit policy element. The literature reflects this concern, both in terms of its prevalence in the scholarship on transfer and articulation policy and the time periods of its mention in studies (e.g., 1990, 2001, 2007 onward).

More striking, perhaps, is the relatively early financial incentive created in Massachusetts to reward academically achieving community college transfer students. The Tuition Advantage Program was created after the Joint Admissions program was ratified in its expanded form (1995-1996) to provide transfer access to all of the state's baccalaureate institutions. While the policy does not explain the circumstances that led to the creation of the Tuition Advantage Program, it does make reference to Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 15A, Section 19, in which tuition waiver guidelines for a number of student categorical conditions are outlined (Commonwealth of Massachusetts, 2012b). The Tuition Advantage Program was added as a financial benefit to eligible Joint Admissions students who met the higher GPA requirement. The Tuition Advantage Program benefit has consistently provided a 33% waiver (or reduction) of the in-state resident tuition rate. This financial incentive was integrated into MassTransfer. In addition, two UMass campuses (Amherst and Lowell) offer community college transfer students a full tuition waiver.

A discrepancy between Massachusetts transfer policy and elements identified in the national literature centers on *common course numbering*. Similar to the general education core curriculum feature and data reporting, this is one of the most commonly introduced policy elements in articles and reports. In the national literature this refers to the fact that, as students attempt to transfer from one college or university to another, they bring academic coursework with institution-specific codes and titles that are determined by the sponsoring school. In the transfer transition, a student must then contend with the transfer credit policy at the new institution, specifically how previously-earned credits correspond to a different coding and value system. None of the Massachusetts statewide transfer policies have formally addressed this theme, although the MassTransfer policy (MDHE, 2008) again addressed this in a limited way via potential subcommittee work "developing...statewide course-to-course equivalencies" (p. C-5).

Low on the list of national *Enrollment* policy elements are the provisions for *junior status* and *appeals*. These are noteworthy features of Massachusetts policy, however, as they appear in early guidelines. Junior standing is formally mentioned in the first statewide Joint Admissions agreement of 1995 requiring students to meet the conditions of Joint Admissions and the Commonwealth Transfer Compact in order to gain this ranking. This is the first visible indication that policymakers recognized the need for more comprehensive guidelines. Similarly, a student appeals process was introduced in the 1990 Revised Commonwealth Transfer Compact policy, which was significant for

its expanded focus on additional regulatory structures such as implementation guidelines and effective date notation.

Structural

The top three structural policy components listed in Table 2 - Data reporting, monitoring and exchange; Statewide articulation agreements; and Legislation - are generally addressed by Massachusetts transfer policies. However, an argument can be made for the relative attention, power, and effort placed into these areas. Transfer data reporting and monitoring, along with information exchange, have been recommended in state guidelines going back to the Revised Commonwealth Transfer Compact policy of 1990. This procedure was further written into the Joint Admissions and recent MassTransfer policies. Yet, the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education does not appear to systematically collect or present comprehensive transfer and articulation statistics, and recent statistics referring to transfer student participation rates, for example, are scattered in other state Department of Higher Education system performance documents (MDHE, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010).

Given the segmented growth of Massachusetts transfer guidelines, the idea of *statewide agreements* is seen at different historical points. The 1990 Revised Commonwealth Transfer Compact policy clarifies its intent “for students transferring from Massachusetts community colleges to public colleges and universities offering the baccalaureate degree” (The Commonwealth Transfer Compact, 1990). In contrast, the Joint Admissions policies of the 1990s were crafted, and renewed in 2006, as bilateral agreements between community colleges and state colleges or community colleges and UMass campuses. This split between intersegmental agreements (community colleges-to-state colleges, community colleges-to-UMass campuses) was mended under the MassTransfer policy of 2009. This policy was written to universally apply across the three higher education segments. However, because MassTransfer requires that eligible associate degrees include core general education coursework, career-oriented programs (such as health, engineering and technology fields) have necessitated separate school-to-school and program-to-program agreements. Students enrolled in career associate degrees covered under separate agreements end up accumulating very high numbers of credits due to the technical curriculum requirements (at the two-year and four-year levels) of these programs.

Lastly, *legislation* is a highlighted structural policy element in the literature, referring to the jurisdiction of state governments and political organizations over public higher education systems, including public statutes that determine the formation and provision of post-secondary education in a given state. Massachusetts transfer policies only reflect this in a broad statement within public education law: the development of a “transfer compact” ensuring transferability of credit (Commonwealth of Massachusetts, 2012a).

Discussion and Implications

This study has provided a descriptive summary of transfer and articulation policy elements synthesized from national literature, as well as a historical analysis of Massachusetts articulation and transfer policies specifically related to these identified elements. In this section, we review the policy elements in national and local contexts of competing community college missions. We then present implications for future state policy discussion and formation in Massachusetts and elsewhere.

Policy Elements in the National Transfer Literature

Our document analysis identified policy clusters that approximate administrative structures found within higher education institutions - academic-oriented affairs and enrollment-oriented

services - as well as a policy cluster containing structural features. These groupings are perhaps commonsensical, as they include the specific administrative functions involved in the transfer process. The academic and enrollment policy elements may be seen as the “what” and “how” of transfer guidelines, with the structural components typifying the framework in which academic transition from one institution to another takes place. The degree to which the various policy features are present in a given state’s higher education system may also be expected to influence the sophistication and effectiveness of transfer pathways.

Yet, policy variability and sophistication are also complicated by the dual community college mission emphasizing workforce preparation alongside traditional academic transfer. In states where occupational workforce development interests are prevalent, policies reinforcing vocational training opportunities may dominate curricula and further strain inter-institutional alignment. In states where baccalaureate and/or professional training are preferred routes to support business, transfer policies may gain more relevance. Ironically, circumstances in Massachusetts plausibly resemble the latter scenario even as community colleges are called on to foster technical and occupational training, further highlighting the complex and often contradictory nature of the policymaking process.

We add to the existing literature on transfer and articulation by confirming earlier policy analyses, from basic chronicling of transfer policy existence (Education Commission of the States, 2001; Smith, 2010; Wellman, 2002) to more nuanced analyses of policy elements and principles (Ignash & Townsend, 2001). This study further reflects earlier calls for articulation policy recommendations at the student as well as institutional level. Policy elements distilled from the literature suggest that transfer students who complete comparable coursework and achieve a certain level academic success in community colleges should be treated the same as native students in terms of academic status and academic potential (Knoell, 1990). Similarly, policy guidelines point toward the need for institutional structures (including formal articulations and monitoring committees) that provide systematic oversight to transfer pathways. Still, articulation policy recommendations can be seen as continuing to fuel the occupational vs. transfer tension due to the importance placed on completion of general education requirements. This preference for the traditional Liberal Arts and Sciences undergraduate experience weighs against those students who choose, and excel in, technical associate degree programs. Policies themselves often reinforce mission conflict.

The Evolution of Massachusetts Transfer Policies

In Massachusetts, sustained efforts to create, refine, and update transfer policies over the last 35 years suggest that the transfer function of community colleges is an important component of state higher education policies, through cycles of more and less public attention to this purpose, and even when overshadowed by calls for an increase in the workforce development mission. This historical view is vital in order to understand how policies came to be in their current forms, as the 21st century community college addresses old concerns of diversion versus democratization, as well as new social, economic, and political developments.

Massachusetts transfer policies are consistent with, and depart from, prevalent transfer policy components identified in the literature in ways that demonstrate both the universality of articulation concerns (e.g., transfer of credits and general education requirements), as well as Massachusetts’ unique emphasis on providing transfer students with financial incentives and ensuring they are admitted with upper-level standing. The most recent Massachusetts policy, *MassTransfer*, includes additional components that appear to address some policy elements in the national literature but have received less attention in Massachusetts, such as statewide transfer guides and faculty involvement.

When the timeline of Massachusetts articulation policies is placed next to Brint and Karabel's (1989) case study account, evidence of the continued tension between transfer and vocational interests is further magnified. While their study was a much broader analysis of the politics of higher education in Massachusetts as related to community colleges, and ours is a targeted analysis of transfer policies in the state, there are provocative and useful connections. Brint and Karabel characterized community college education in Massachusetts as dominated by vocationalization throughout the 1970s (p. 184). However, the first statewide transfer policy, the Commonwealth Transfer Compact, was also implemented at this time. Moreover, the enrollment data used to support Brint and Karabel's contention are taken from UMass-Amherst, the very same institution that led in the development, and was the intended beneficiary, of the Commonwealth Transfer Compact. This dynamic raises an interesting question regarding the motivation of leadership at the state's flagship university to expend energy creating transfer pathways at the same time that community college education was portrayed in an influential study as turning away from traditional academic interests.

Brint and Karabel analyzed community college development into the 1980s, asserting, "reorganization of public higher education ... provided an opportunity to tie the community colleges more closely to the state's economic development plans" (p. 193). Here again, however, evidence points to a more complex situation of articulation policy development. Between 1984 and 1990 Massachusetts transfer policies were expanding to include all undergraduate segments of public higher education: community colleges, state colleges, and university campuses. These policies also became more sophisticated, as academic, enrollment, and structural policy components were incorporated into the state's index of articulation guidelines. Because Brint and Karabel's analysis ends in 1985, there is limited comparison with the formation of later Massachusetts transfer guidelines other than to note that additional public policies were promulgated and enhanced at the same time that the booming information technology business sector in the state was reportedly seeking more technically trained employees. This coincidental timing highlights the continued tension of vocational and transfer orientations in Massachusetts, and suggests the need for a more nuanced view of complementary, rather than competing, community college missions.

Implications for Future Policymaking

Although the examples above of the ongoing strain between occupational and academic transfer missions may confirm the philosophical and organizational conflicts with which community colleges contend, scholars have also suggested policy directions that may move us beyond a false dichotomy of diversion-democratization, recognizing that both occupational and transfer missions are vital and need to be sustained. We next introduce trends that acknowledge and respond to this tension, and which add detail to three basic recommendations for state policymakers: a) create policies advocating explicit transfer opportunities for community college students enrolled in occupational programs, b) consider the use of stackable credentials to support community college students initially pursuing technical preparation for employment on the way towards subsequent academic advancement, and c) conduct state-specific analysis of transfer policies applying a framework similar to the one used in this study to better understand how individual strengths and limitations influence policy reform within the context of state-determined higher education priorities.

Transfer opportunities in occupational fields. Knoell's (1990) report included early advocacy for the creation of articulation policies governing the transferability of career/occupational associate programs toward baccalaureate degrees. In her call for agreements "for majors in career fields (*italics original*) in which both two-year and four-year institutions offer degree

programs that are oriented to employment” (p. 81), Knoell blurs the boundary between purely vocational and transfer interests. This policy track is well documented in the "Academics" grouping of Table 1 (under the heading "Selective majors and technical program articulations") and is further reinforced by evidence of state higher education systems that have formulated policy to validate and encourage the transferability of associate degrees in designated career and technical fields (Ignash & Townsend, 2000).

To a limited degree, the history of transfer policy development in Massachusetts includes recognition of vocational education (see Revised Commonwealth Transfer Compact policy). Over time, the Joint Admissions policy included career and technical associate degrees, although individual credit transfer remained unreliable. The most current policy, MassTransfer, with its emphasis on a general education coursework core, has resulted in a decided move away from vocational transferability. Still, traditional strategies of program-to-program agreements between institutions as well as emerging technology-gearred partnerships (e.g. Commonwealth Alliance for Information Technology Education [CAITE] at UMass-Amherst) are working to increase the potential for career-oriented articulation pathways between the state's community colleges and baccalaureate universities. Results from this study and others similar to it can help to clarify for policymakers just how they are, or are not, addressing possible transfer for students in community colleges who are enrolled in vocational or occupational terminal programs.

Local workforce demands. Massachusetts is also a case of continued tension between the traditional interests of elite academia and the state's public and private interests in a qualified workforce. Tuition increases and static (or downward) freshman enrollments at private and public baccalaureate institutions have created incentives to look to community colleges to replenish populations with experienced and capable students. Moreover, transfer agreements for academic pathways in projected high-employment fields such as life sciences, information technology, and allied health (Massachusetts Department of Labor and Workforce Development, 2012) are grounded in the vocational strengths of the state's community colleges. This blurring of interests is evident in the growing appeal of “stackable credentials,” a current buzzword that refers to the concept of condensed, short-term certificates upon which terminal associate degrees are "stacked," serving as a foundation for eventual transfer to academic four-year programs. An advantage of this model is the capacity to quickly respond to focused workforce training needs, while also creating prospects for further education and credential attainment. Community college leaders in Massachusetts have initially capitalized on the "stackable credentials" model in the implementation of a federal Department of Labor grant (United States Department of Labor, 2011). However, there is work ahead in extending the idea fully to transfer pathways. Nevertheless policymakers in other states can look to the Massachusetts experience as an example of how to maximize on community college strengths to extend educational pathways for citizens (and businesses) with employment priorities.

Unique public higher education systems. For other states, our case study of Massachusetts can serve as a model for additional analyses. Learning how articulation policies do, or do not, align with national trends may help to clarify state-specific advantages and challenges. In a comparison of policies in Indiana, Kentucky, and New Jersey (Sauer, Jackson, Hazelgrove, Scott, & Ignash, 2005), transfer and articulation reform is described as vigorously enacted by political leaders in two states and voluntarily initiated by higher education officials in the other. These findings underscore how, despite resource constraints and opposing priorities, higher education leaders continue to commit attention to advancing the transfer mission. This promising, yet limited, body of literature can serve as a catalyst for policymakers to be more intentional, thorough, and precise about what they are and are not including in transfer policies, in relation

to other states and the nation as a whole. Statewide articulation policies can build on common/universal concerns while also formulating guidelines and practices that are specific to local higher education constraints.

It is important to note that awareness of the diversity of state higher education systems with respect to articulation development goes back over two decades. Early progressive community college reformers who proposed national articulation guidelines recognized that variable state resources, structures, and customs would all impact policy formation (Knoell, 1990). Importantly, these national principles, largely reflected in the distilled policy elements included in this report, are as valid today in the 21st century as they were over 20 years ago. In this vein, we offer Tables 1 and 2 as potential templates to assist individual states in the review and evaluation of transfer policies. Policymakers and higher education leaders may find value in adapting these constructs as tools to support thoughtful, state-specific formation of transfer policies. We also encourage other researchers to expand and improve our line of inquiry, recognizing the limitations of this study.

Conclusion

Just as community colleges have endured competing missions emphasizing workforce and transfer objectives, so too do state articulation policies manifest common academic, enrollment, and structural elements at the same time they reflect individual state histories, educational policies, and organizational formations. This is the case in Massachusetts, where transfer policies have evolved and persisted, countering the assertion of vocational importance (Brint & Karabel, 1989), even as state priorities and initiatives have shifted through the years. This lesson importantly carries over to other state community college systems, where the tension of workforce and transfer demands are addressed (perhaps with varying degrees of success) in local, recognizable ways.

Grounded in the democratic ideals of higher education access that began in the late-19th through the mid-20th centuries, today's community colleges continue to offer different educational experiences to students of differing abilities and with differing goals. As long as the unique community college mission blends together occupational and transfer objectives, the tendency to perceive contradiction exists. Yet the corollary mission of providing open access also creates the impetus to join these seemingly disparate missions together to meet the diverse educational needs of students in the 21st century.

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Appendix

Primary Sources for Massachusetts Transfer Policies

Commonwealth Transfer Compact, 1974

Commonwealth Transfer Compact (Revised), 1984

Commonwealth Transfer Compact (Revised, with implementation guidelines), 1990

Joint Admissions, 1992-1993

Joint Admissions, 1995

Joint Admissions, 1996

Tuition Advantage Program, 1997

Tuition Advantage Program (Revised), 2002

Education Compact, 2004

Joint Admissions (Revised), 2006

MassTransfer, 2009

Early Childhood Education Compact (Revised), 2011

About the Authors

Daniel de la Torre, Jr.

Quinsigamond Community College

ddelatorre@qcc.mass.edu

Daniel de la Torre, Jr., is the coordinator of transfer and articulation at Quinsigamond Community College in Worcester, Massachusetts. In this capacity, he implements policy and carries out practices to support community college student transition to baccalaureate institutions. He is also a doctoral candidate in Educational Policy and Leadership in the Department of Educational Policy, Research, and Administration at the University of Massachusetts Amherst.

Ryan S. Wells

University of Massachusetts Amherst

rswells@educ.umass.edu

Ryan Wells is an assistant professor of higher education in the Department of Educational Policy, Research, and Administration at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. His research interests primarily concern aspects of the transition to postsecondary education, including community college transfer. Other topics of recent research on college access and equity include social class, gender, immigrant status, and financial aid policy.

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