

Transfer Policy in Washington State

Report of the Joint Access Oversight Group

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Executive Summary

Students in Washington have the advantage of a robust higher education system that provides many paths to a baccalaureate. A statewide transfer policy helps students take classes at two- and four-year institutions while they earn bachelor's degrees. This policy works well for most students. Nevertheless, students need plenty of timely and accurate information to navigate their chosen paths to efficiently and effectively meet the bachelor's degree requirements for general education, major specific and elective courses.

Student choices – Pathways in preparation for transfer:

- **Direct Transfer Agreement associate's degree (also called "the DTA"):** 60 quarter credits of general education courses, plus courses that prepare students for classes in their major and electives.
- **Associate of Science – Transfer (AS-T):** Includes the math and science courses needed to prepare students for biology, chemistry, earth science, physics, computer science and engineering majors.
- **Major Related Program (MRPs):** Course plans that prepare students for specific majors, including general education courses and a limited number of electives.
- **Associate in Applied Science (AAS-T):** A workforce degree developed to meet industry standards for immediate employment which students can apply toward applied specific baccalaureate degrees.
- **Transfer before completing an associate degree.**

When do courses transfer?

Courses as a part of associate degrees that parallel traditional freshmen/sophomore courses: The courses that transfer best are the ones that parallel those taken by freshmen and sophomores at universities seeking entry to the same major. The MRP, DTA and AS-T pathways (see above) are designed specifically to parallel such course selections. By taking these degrees students are assured that:

- At least 90 quarter credits will transfer.
- A small number of technical courses will transfer (ranges from 5 to 15 quarter credits).
- Courses will transfer to the university, even if the student changes his/her major.
- Students will not need to repeat courses and course sequences already completed.

Courses in workforce-related associate degrees: Courses taken in the AAS-T (workforce degree) transfer best to an applied baccalaureate degree that is specifically designed to match up with the focus in the workforce degree. Otherwise, the technical coursework does not generally transfer. If students transfer outside of an applied baccalaureate degree, they may need to take introductory courses taught with a theoretical perspective that cover similar topics to the applied course work already completed.

Courses without an associate degree: Students who transfer without a degree and take courses similar to those traditionally offered by universities will have those transfer courses accepted. However, a course taken without completing a degree may not transfer if there is no parallel course offered at the student's baccalaureate institution.

While the details above are comprehensive, they are also complex. Students need the advantage of a **web-based statewide advising tool kit** to help them know with confidence which classes will help them efficiently reach their goals.

Introduction

Students in Washington have the advantage of a higher education system that affords a great deal of choice regarding the path to a bachelor's degree. To support transfer while maintaining student choice, Washington State has established a transfer policy that works well for most students. Nevertheless, students need timely and accurate information to navigate their chosen path to meet the bachelor's degree requirements for general education, major specific and elective courses.

What's in a bachelor's degree?

A bachelor's degree generally has 180 quarter credits (equal to 120 semester credits¹). About half (90 quarter credits, or 60 semester credits) are usually taken in the freshman and sophomore years; by design, that's the same number of credits that make up an associate degree. Every degree – both associate and baccalaureate – includes these three parts:

- **General Education:** “Gen Ed” is a common and critical component of all baccalaureate and transferable associate degrees. To earn a baccalaureate (also called “bachelor’s”) degree, a student must take credits in a broad range of subjects. These include quantitative reasoning (mathematics), communication skills (such as writing and public speaking), science (such as general biology or chemistry), social science (such as sociology or cultural anthropology), humanities (such as literature and world languages), and others. Colleges and universities intend this breadth of background to provide valuable skills and knowledge irrespective of the chosen major field of study. About a third of the bachelor's degree is devoted to general education, much of which is completed in the first two years of college work (about 60-70 quarter credits).
- **Preparation for the Major and Major Courses:** Students take courses that cover the background needed to perform well in major-level courses followed by courses in their chosen field of study. Students typically complete the courses in preparation for a major (such as finite math, statistics, psychology, etc., depending on the major) during the freshmen and sophomore years, and take courses in the major as juniors and seniors. Some programs (e.g., engineering) require many courses in preparation for the major during the first two years of college, others (e.g., history) require far fewer. Colleges and universities have developed statewide agreements with clear specifications regarding the transfer courses needed to prepare for a major that parallel the courses that freshmen and sophomores take at universities. Additionally, students who are very well-prepared can take courses in their major before their junior year.
- **Electives:** Associate and bachelor's degrees also provide students the opportunity to explore an area of study that is not required, or to augment an area beyond what is required (generally ranging from 20 to 50 quarter credits). In business, teacher preparation and many of the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields, students have more courses required to prepare for the major and thus fewer elective course choices. In some fields, the curriculum is less prescribed and students have nearly a third of their course work available as electives. Because the elective category is the smallest of the three, students need good information to assist them in choosing mostly courses that serve as preparation for their major or as general education.

¹ All Washington State community and technical colleges operate on the quarter system as do all public baccalaureate institutions, except Washington State University (WSU), which operates on the semester system. Most Washington independent colleges and universities also operate on the semester system. A typical course in the quarter system is offered for 5 credits with a full-load equal to 15 credits for the term, 45 credits for the year. Courses in the semester system may either be 3 credits or 5 credits, with a full-load for the semester equal to 15 credits, for the year 30 credits. A year-long sequence of courses – for example first year world language courses – is offered as three 5 quarter credit courses or two 5 semester credit courses.

A student seeking a bachelor's degree has choices

The student can start at a bachelor's degree-granting institution or the student can start at a community or technical college and plan to transfer². In Washington State, if a student plans to transfer, there are several approaches, or *pathways*, that student can take:

- **Direct Transfer Agreement associate degree (also called “the DTA”)**: The DTA focuses on meeting the common lower division general education requirements and preparation for the major with 60 quarter credits in the various general education categories. Once the student successfully completes a DTA pathway, all courses required in that degree will transfer to every Washington public baccalaureate institution and to the many Washington independent institutions participating in the agreement. If admitted to the university, the university will consider the transfer student as having junior standing.
- **Associate of Science – Transfer (AS-T)**: This degree focuses on the math and science courses needed to prepare for biology, chemistry, earth science, physics, computer science and engineering majors. In a course-taking pattern that parallels students preparing at universities for science and engineering as freshmen and sophomores, transfer students pursuing the AS-T complete 45 quarter credits of general education courses at the community college, and the remainder as juniors and seniors.
- **Major Related Program (MRPs)**: Students in some majors must carefully select their elective and general education courses to assure they will be eligible to apply for the major in their junior year. For these majors – business, elementary education, pre-nursing, engineering, engineering technology, technology, secondary science and math teacher preparation – colleges and universities have developed major specific agreements (“major related programs” or MRPs) that assure transfer students complete requirements in a manner parallel to university freshmen and sophomores. Each agreement follows either the DTA or AS-T structure. As many of these majors are quite popular, there may be more qualified applicants than spots in some instances. The Joint Access Oversight Group (JAOG)³ has oversight responsibility for development of MRPs.

Additionally, students may elect to prepare for work via an **Associate in Applied Science (AAS-T)**, a workforce degree developed to meet industry standards for immediate employment. These students may later choose to transfer. As will be discussed in more detail below, an increasing number of bachelor's degree options exist that apply the technical course work in an AAS-T to the bachelor's degree requirements.

What happens when a student does not complete an associate degree? For a wide variety of personal and educational reasons, a student may choose to transfer before completing an associate degree. Each of the baccalaureate institutions has developed “course equivalencies” to let students and advisors know which courses count for which requirements.

² Universities consider newly admitted students to be transfers when they enter with college-level coursework completed after high school graduation. Transfers with 40 or more transfer credits are admitted based on their performance in those college classes often without regard to their high school record or college-admission test scores. Students transferring less than 40 quarter credits must satisfy Higher Education Coordinating Board minimum admissions requirements established for freshmen including meeting high school College Academic Distribution Requirements (CADR).

³ JAOG is a voluntary standing committee of academic leaders representing community and technical colleges and public and independent baccalaureate institutions and the Higher Education Coordinating Board.

The Path Chosen and Effect on Course Transfer

The table indicates how the path chosen by the student affects course transfer in Washington.

If a student	Earns a Major Related Program (MRP)	Earns a statewide degree that applies to multiple majors (AS-T &DTA)	Earns a Workforce associate degree (AAS-T)	Transfers without earning a degree
Transfers each year	800	10,400	800	6,000 ⁴
Will my course always be accepted in transfer? ⁵	<p><u>Yes</u></p> <p>At least 90 credits⁶ will be accepted in transfer, sometimes more.</p>	<p><u>Yes</u></p> <p>At least 90 credits will be accepted in transfer, sometimes more.</p>	<p><u>Sometimes</u></p> <p>Yes – if students transfer to a BAS-type degree (see below), up to 90 credits will be accepted.</p> <p>No – if students transfer to a BA and many BS degrees, then only 20-30 credits will be accepted.</p>	<p><u>Sometimes</u></p> <p>– Courses will be accepted in transfer for the broad range of courses similar to those traditionally offered by universities.</p> <p>– A course may not transfer if there is no parallel course in the bachelor’s degree program selected by the student.</p>
Will my technical courses transfer? ⁷	<p><u>Yes with limitations</u></p> <p>Between 5 and 10 credits of technical courses are accepted in transfer.</p>	<p><u>Yes with limitations</u></p> <p>– DTA – up to 15 credits of technical courses are accepted in transfer</p> <p>– AS-T – up to 5 credits of technical courses accepted.</p>	<p><u>Sometimes</u></p> <p>Yes – if a student transfers to BAS-type degree including an Upside Down Degree⁸ up to 80 technical credits will transfer.</p> <p>No – credits will not transfer if a student pursues most BA and BS degrees.</p>	<p><u>No</u></p> <p>Technical courses are not generally accepted in transfer unless the technical courses (such as Introduction to Early Childhood Education) parallel a course offered in the university program.</p>

⁴ About half the students transferring without degrees transfer to out-of-state institutions. About 400 students with associate degrees also transfer out of state.

⁵ Successful transfer assumes appropriate grades in each course and higher grade standards for key courses such as the business courses in preparation for the business major.

⁶ All credits are given as quarter credits.

⁷ “Technical courses” typically prepare students for employment after a year or two of college. They are aligned with industry requirements specific to each field.

⁸ The Upside Down Degree at The Evergreen State College accepts the technical course work in many AAS-T degrees as focused study typical of the junior and senior year. After transfer, students complete broad general education course work typical of the freshmen and sophomore year. Thus the “Upside Down” title for the degree.

If a student	Earns a Major Related Program (MRP)	Earns a statewide degree that applies to multiple majors (AS-T &DTA)	Earns a Workforce associate degree (AAS-T)	Transfers without earning a degree
Transfers each year	800	10,400	800	6,000
Will my courses be accepted even if I change majors?	<p><u>Yes, however additional credits may be required</u></p> <p>Like students who enter four-year institutions as freshmen, transfer students may need to take additional courses to meet requirements for the new major</p>	<p><u>Yes, however additional credits may be required</u></p> <p>Like students who enter four-year institutions as freshmen, transfer students may need to take additional courses to meet requirements for the new major</p>	<p><u>Sometimes</u></p> <p>Like students who enter four-year institution as freshmen, transfer students may need to take additional courses to meet general education and preparation for the new major requirements.</p>	<p><u>Sometimes</u></p> <p>– Courses will be accepted in transfer for the broad range of courses similar to those traditionally offered by universities</p> <p>– A course may not transfer if there is no parallel course in the bachelor’s degree program selected by the student.</p>
Will I be required to repeat a completed course or course area?	<p><u>No</u></p> <p>The student does not have to repeat a course taken within the requirements of the MRP.</p>	<p><u>Generally no</u></p> <p>– Students changing majors sometimes need another course in an area they may have assumed was completed.</p> <p>– Students who complete only a <i>part</i> of a year-long course sequence sometimes must repeat some part of the sequence.</p>	<p><u>Generally no</u></p> <p>Students completing technical courses designed to prepare students for work, but not for transfer, may cover some similar material when they enroll in the transfer-oriented course in the same field (example – Practical Accounting I and Principles of Accounting I).</p>	<p><u>Sometimes</u></p> <p>Two types of “repeats” are common:</p> <p>(1) Students may need to take an additional course in one of the general education areas due to differing institutional requirements.⁹</p> <p>(2) Students who took courses never designed for transfer (typically courses designed for workforce preparation).</p>

Do pre-college (remedial) courses transfer?

No. Students sometimes need to take courses below the college level to improve their skills sufficiently to succeed in college-level courses. While necessary for college success, colleges and universities do not count these courses toward the associate or baccalaureate degrees and do not accept them in transfer.

⁹ For example, a student completes two environmental science classes and a biology class at a community college. However, the university expects that students complete both a physical science (chemistry or physics) as well as a biological science (exclusive of environmental science). In this case, the student would have completed “three science courses” required at the community college but would still need to take a physical science course to complete the university requirement.

Does college-level work completed while in high school transfer?

Yes. High school students who complete college-level work through Running Start, College in the High School, Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate have courses accepted in transfer as follows:

- **Advanced Placement (AP)** courses: Baccalaureate institutions generally accept in transfer evidence of AP performance based on the AP test scores, though the required scores and assigned credits vary by institution and by subject.
- **International Baccalaureate (IB)** course: As with AP, students must complete the IB examination in order to seek college credit and then present the test results for the IB credit transfer.
- **Dual Credit (Running Start, College in the High School)**: Because dual credit work consists of college-level courses offered by college faculty or high school teachers approved by the college, the courses transfer in the same manner as other college-level courses.¹⁰

What are the current MRPs, and what are the future plans for MRPs?

Clearly the transfer expectations of legislators and students are met for students who follow the Major Related Program (MRP) pathways. As of fall 2007, the following MRP agreements exist:

- **Associate in Science – Transfer MRPs**
 - **4 secondary science teacher pathways** – Associate in **Biology Education**, Associate in **Chemistry Education**, Associate in **General Science Education**, and Associate in **Physics Education AS-T/MRP** to transfer for teacher certification in secondary sciences. *Implemented 2003. Institutions: CWU, EWU, WWU, WSU, and St. Martin's U.*
 - **3 engineering pathways** – **Bioengineering and Chemical Engineering**, **Computer and Electrical Engineering**, and **Mechanical/Civil/Aeronautical/Industrial/Materials Science Engineering AS-T/MRP**, for engineering transfer. *Implemented in 2005. Institutions: EWU, UW, WSU, Gonzaga, St. Martin's U, Seattle Pacific U, Seattle U, and Walla Walla U.*
 - **2 engineering technology pathways** – **Electrical and Computer Engineering Technology**, and **Mechanical Engineering Technology AS-T/MRP** for engineering technology transfer. *Implemented 2007. Institutions: CWU, EWU, and WWU (these are the only institutions offering these degrees).*
- **Associate in Arts or Arts/Science DTA/MRPs**
 - Associate in **Business DTA/MRP** for transfer to business and accounting bachelors degree programs. *Implemented in 2003, revised in 2006. Institutions: CWU, EWU, WWU, UW, WSU, Gonzaga, Heritage U, Pacific Lutheran U, St. Martin's U, Seattle Pacific U, Seattle U, and Walla Walla U.*
 - Associate in **Elementary Education DTA/MRP** to transfer to teacher certification programs. *Implemented in 2005. Institutions: CWU, EWU, WSU, WWU, City U, Gonzaga, Heritage U, Lesley U, Pacific Lutheran U, St. Martin's U, Seattle Pacific U, Walla Walla U, Whitworth U.*
 - Associate in **Math Education DTA/MRP** to transfer to teacher certification programs in secondary math. *Implemented 2003. Institutions: CWU, EWU, WWU, WSU.*
 - Associate in **Pre-Nursing Science DTA/MRP** to transfer into basic nursing (not RN to BSN pathway – see below) programs. *Implemented 2005. Institutions: UWS, WSU, Northwest U, Seattle U, Seattle Pacific U, Pacific Lutheran, and Walla Walla U.*

¹⁰ The University of Puget Sound and Whitman College evaluate courses taken prior to high school graduation differently than courses taken after high school graduation. Some out of state institutions similarly subject dual credit courses to scrutiny that does not apply if the courses are taken after high school graduation.

- Associate in **Technology** DTA/MRP for transfer to CWU's industrial technology and EWU's technology majors. *Implemented in 2007. Institutions: CWU and EWU (these are the only institutions offering these degrees).*

Four additional pathways are currently under development:

- Associate in **Earth and Space Science Secondary Education** to transfer to teacher certification programs in secondary earth and space science.
- Associate in **Construction Management**.
- Pathway for transfer in **Biology**. The current transfer pathway is the Associate in Science –Transfer (AS-T); it is being reviewed because there is some evidence that the AS-T is not the best match for many biology majors.
- Pathway for transfer in **Computer Science**. The current transfer pathway is the Associate in Science – Transfer (AS-T); it is being reviewed because there is some evidence that the AS-T is not the best match for many computer science majors.

The Joint Access Oversight Group (JAOG) established criteria to identify where MRPs may need to be developed for a given major. An MRP will be considered when the following are applicable:

- The number of courses specified as preparation for the major and needed in the first two years is substantial.
- Several institutions award the bachelor's degree in the field.
- A credit gap exists: total credits earned by transfers who graduate are substantially higher than credits earned by students who started at a baccalaureate institution.
- A pattern of under-preparation exists for most transfer students.
- The major is in high demand by students.

With the first MRPs only recently implemented (between 2003 and 2007), the number of students completing these associate degrees is still small – 800 students in 2006-07. JAOG has agreed to focus on assessment of the current MRPs before deciding on the creation of new MRPs beyond those currently under development.

How is the need for transfer paths for technical associate degree graduates being addressed and what new plans exist?

Community and technical college students preparing for immediate employment, who also plan to transfer, complete the Associate in Applied Science-T (AAS-T) degree. Typically only a portion of the AAS-T credits apply to the general education requirements (a quarter to a third of the credits). Graduates with an AAS-T face a critical transfer issue related to how the rest of the credits – the technical course credits – apply to the general education and major requirements of the baccalaureate degree. Unless the bachelor's degree is specifically designed to apply the AAS-T technical course work to the requirements for the major, those credits serve only as electives and commonly (as noted in the table above) do not transfer if the university does not offer course work in the technical field.

Universities and colleges have addressed this issue by creating specific baccalaureate pathways for AAS-T graduates. These are sometimes called the Bachelor of Applied Science (BAS) degrees. The table below summarizes the growing list of existing pathways.

Existing Pathways from Workforce Associate Degrees (AAS-T) to the Baccalaureate

Pathway	Public Baccalaureate	Independent and For Profit Baccalaureate
BAS-type degrees¹¹ at baccalaureate institutions (degree completion programs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CWU – Bachelor of Applied Science in 4 areas: Information Technology/Administrative Management; Food Service Management; Health and Safety Management; and Industrial Technology • EWU – Bachelor of Science in Applied Technology; Bachelor of Science in Dental Hygiene; and Bachelor of Arts in Children’s Studies, Early Childhood Education Option • WSU – Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) for the Registered Nurse (degree completion for Associate Degree Nursing graduates); BA in Interior Design; and BA in Human Development • UW Tacoma and UW Bothell – BSN for Registered Nursing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PLU – BSN for the Licensed Practical Nurse and BSN for Registered Nurse • University of Phoenix – Bachelor of Science in Management (BSM) • DeVry University – Bachelor of Science in Technical Management (BSTM) • City University – Business Administration
BAS-type degrees at community and technical colleges [pilots] (degree completion programs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peninsula College – Bachelor of Applied Science in Applied Management • South Seattle Community College – Bachelor of Applied Science in Hospitality Management • Bellevue Community College – Bachelor of Applied Science in Radiation and Imaging Sciences • Olympic College – Bachelor of Science Nursing • 2 additional pilot programs to be selected in 2008 with enrollment beginning in fall 2009 	
Upside down degrees (focus on liberal arts in junior and senior year)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Evergreen State College – Upside Down Degree 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seattle Pacific University – Professional Studies Bachelor’s degree • Whitworth – Bachelor of Liberal Studies with major in program management, chemical dependency, social services, or humanities

Given the relative newness of BAS-type pathways, the higher education community encourages institutions to continue to develop pathways based on the strengths and interests of the baccalaureate institutions and community and technical colleges.

¹¹ BAS stands for Bachelor of Applied Science, a degree designed for individuals who hold an associate of applied science degree (AAS-T, a workforce degree). The BAS applies the technical course credits toward a baccalaureate degree in management, in advanced levels in the technical area or in both management and the technical area. Some BAS-type degrees follow a wide variety of naming conventions including Professional Studies and Bachelors of Science in various applied fields.

Recommendation: Fund a Web-based Advising Tool Kit

The best designed transfer pathway does not work until students find and follow it. Washington State has a critical need for better use of technology to share, all in one place, the map of transfer paths described here. Better use of technology to enhance communication among institutions will also ensure that maps are clear, accurate, and up to date. Students will have the information to make the best choices to meet their educational goals.

To achieve this greater level of communication, the state of Washington needs a **web-based statewide advising tool kit** to guide students toward the most efficient pathways to achieve their goals and to connect and organize each college's and university's course data in a way that is easy for students and families to navigate. The state's one-stop shop with comprehensive information would also:

- Provide students with detailed guidance on the availability of degree pathways and transfer of specific courses among Washington institutions.
- Illustrate for students what courses they must still complete at each chosen institution to achieve their degree goal in their selected major.
- Provide system wide, comprehensive and consistent information to advisors, faculty, and other professional staff who interact with and support students making decisions about transfer.

Joint Access Oversight Group Membership

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