

Assessment of Associate Degree for Transfer Offerings in the California Community Colleges

INTRODUCTION

In June 2023, the Joint Legislative Audit Committee directed the California State Auditor to review the California higher education systems' efforts to improve the percentage of California community college students who transfer to a California State University (CSU) or University of California (UC) campus. The California State Auditor completed the review and on September 24, 2024 published their findings in the report [2023-123 California's Systems of Public Higher Education – Streamlining the Community College Transfer Process Could Increase Access to Bachelor's Degrees](#). The report includes 22 recommendations for the three California public systems of higher education and the California Legislature, nine of which are specific to the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office (Chancellor's Office).

To fully respond to the nine recommendations directed toward the Chancellor's Office, the Educational Services and Support and Research divisions joined efforts shortly after the publication of the audit and formed teams to address each recommendation. For Recommendation 13, a survey was created and disseminated to gather information on Associate Degree for Transfer (ADT) offerings by California community colleges.

Recommendation 13: To help close existing gaps in the [Associate Degree for Transfer] ADT's availability and impact within its system, the [Chancellor's Office] should document a process by September 2025 for requesting and analyzing specific rationales from community colleges that have decided not to offer the ADT for a particular transfer model curriculum. This process should also include taking the following actions:

- Review a selection of the rationales for not offering the ADT, with a focus on the areas in which it would most benefit students to have an available ADT pathway.
- Using criteria such as whether other community colleges are able to offer the ADT, and consulting with the systemwide academic senate or other faculty as necessary, determine whether the selected rationales are reasonable and make recommendations to the colleges as appropriate.
- To the extent its reviews identify specific challenges in offering the ADT in certain subject areas, notify the appropriate committee or group so that it may consider those challenges when revising transfer model curricula.

In April 2025, the Chancellor's Office disseminated the survey, requesting all chief instructional officers (CIOs) to complete the survey in order to inform the Chancellor's

September 2025
Transfer Audit Regarding Recommendation 13

Office response to Recommendation 13 from the California State Auditor regarding transfer in California public higher education systems.

The communication to the CIOs also requested that their responses be coordinated with faculty and staff, including the college academic senate president, curriculum committee chair, articulation officer, admissions and records personnel, transfer center director, and other personnel that have expertise in these curricular matters.

BACKGROUND – TRANSFER MODEL CURRICULUM AND THE ASSOCIATE DEGREE FOR TRANSFER

Currently, there are 49 transfer model curricula (TMCs) available on the Chancellor's Office website¹. The TMCs are the framework under which ADTs are created. Each community college is required to create an ADT for every major and area of emphasis offered by the college for each approved TMC. Based on information in the Chancellor's Office Curriculum Inventory (COCI) system, the number of ADTs offered by California community colleges range from a low of about 12 to a high of possibly 49.²

In turn, the California State University is to guarantee admission with junior status to any community college student who meets all of the requirements of the ADT, with admission to a program or major and concentration that is similar, as determined by each CSU campus, to the student's community college transfer model curriculum-aligned associate degree for transfer.³

SURVEY DESIGN

The survey was a mixed methods survey consisting of a quantitative assessment of the ADTs offered and, for those ADTs that are not offered, a qualitative assessment on the reasons for not offering the ADTs. 81 of the 115 degree-granting California community colleges responded to the survey, resulting in a response rate of about 70%.

¹ Listed under ADT Submission Forms as Cal-GETC Breadth Forms: <https://www.cccco.edu/About-Us/Chancellors-Office/Divisions/Educational-Services-and-Support/What-we-do/Curriculum-and-Instruction-Unit/Templates-For-Approved-Transfer-Model-Curriculum>

² For an accurate count of the ADTs offered by each college, a search of the college catalog is required.

³ EDC:
https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes_displayText.xhtml?lawCode=EDC&division=5.&title=3.&part=40.&chapter=9.2.&article=3.

FINDINGS

The most common reasons for colleges not offering an ADT included:

- The college does not offer all of the courses required for the ADT;
- The college does not have the faculty, facilities, or student enrollment to support offering the ADT;
- The college cannot offer the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) courses within the 60-unit limit for the ADT;
- The college does not have the staff capacity to create the ADT; and
- No baccalaureate degree has been deemed similar to the transfer model curriculum, which is the framework for the ADT, at a nearby CSU campus.

The “write-in” reasons for not offering ADTs had three prevailing themes:

- ADT “Misalignment” with transfer destinations, institutional goals, and local community and regional workforce needs;
- Campus resources to support ADTs; and
- ADT development and approval processes.

MISALIGNMENT

Respondents’ most universal impression of ADTs is that of a misalignment with transfer destinations, [community college] institutional goals, or with local community and regional workforce needs.

TRANSFER DESTINATIONS

Transfer Model Curricula (TMCs), the framework under which ADTs are created, are required by statute to be agreed upon between the California Community Colleges and each of the participating California State University campuses. Often these curricular pathways do not translate seamlessly with majors in the University of California system and other transfer institutions. For students who want to maintain non-CSU institutions as options, committing to an ADT may add “additional requirements” such as additional time or units in order to complete multiple educational pathways depending on their desired transfer destinations. Due to the complexity of this process, students also need additional transfer counseling services which also impacts student time and capacity.

Some community colleges are feeder colleges for impacted CSUs or CSUs that have not deemed many TMCs similar to a baccalaureate degree. In this case, community colleges report that it is not feasible for the community college to offer ADTs that do not matriculate to their primary transfer destination.

“Our nearby CSU is a highly competitive institution that embraces a statewide transfer mission and **only recognizes 11 ADTs** as being aligned with their transfer admission criteria. This results in our students often having to **take additional classes** to complete an ADT **and satisfy the transfer admission requirements.**”

As a result, “A large number of our students transfer to out of state, private, and even for-profit options” rather than navigate California’s intersegmental system that some respondents describe as “grossly inequitable.” Colleges report feeling pressure to improve transfer rates, but “If … capacity is not opened up [and alignment is not figured out] at **CSUs and UCs**, the ADT guarantee will not result in the number of transfers we could potentially achieve.”

INSTITUTIONAL GOALS AND LOCAL COMMUNITY AND REGIONAL WORKFORCE NEEDS

ADT misalignment with institutional goals is a primary concern for rural and rural-serving colleges, cited as being “in a **transfer desert with no CSU within 2 hours**,” and low student demand for some ADTs. Many rural and rural-serving colleges do not have existing programs that could support specific ADTs, making those ADTs “not feasible” at those institutions.

Finding qualified faculty who meet minimum qualifications (MQs), especially for social justice discipline ADTs remains an issue for rural and rural-serving colleges. Rural and rural-serving colleges note that some ADTs are also out of alignment with their local community and workforce needs, and state that community college baccalaureate degrees are a potential solution:

“What would help us out as a rural school in a transfer desert … would be for **us to offer baccalaureate degrees** in subject areas that our students and communities have the greatest need for: nursing, teacher credentialing, information technology, business…**without having to leave our region.**”

While these concerns were brought forward primarily by rural and rural-serving colleges, they were shared by more urban colleges as well.

CAMPUS RESOURCES

The findings from the field regarding campus resources are best summarized by the following:

“While there is understanding of the many benefits of ADTs, faculty capacity, [improved] administrative support, and adequate facilities would help create more ADT offerings.”

Colleges are “limited by the number of full-time [instructional] faculty” available to develop and implement ADTs, so “[they]may be hesitant to build a program that relies on [part-time or] adjunct faculty or inconsistent staffing.” Given the complex nature of ADT misalignment, counseling faculty and classified professionals also have limited capacity,

as “**high student-to-counselor ratios and limited support staff** make it difficult to provide timely, accurate guidance.”

Developing and implementing ADTs at the colleges is made more complicated by “the absence of a **centralized or clearly defined administrative lead**... responsible for identifying, initiating, and shepherding ADT development through curriculum and governance processes.”

Many colleges struggle to develop ADTs due to a lack of facilities. Commonly cited ADTs include “Hospitality Management; Public Health Science; Public Health; Global Studies; Film, Television, and Electronic Media; and Theatre Arts.”

DEVELOPMENT AND APPROVAL PROCESS

The quantitative data show that 77% of colleges view the biggest barrier to developing ADTs in STEM fields is the 60-unit cap on ADTs. This is borne out in the qualitative findings as well, as almost every college’s response mentioned that “**securing increased unit allowances for STEM [and Music]** degrees (i.e. up to 66 units) is essential.”

Practitioners in the field are concerned that “Chancellor’s Office **review time for ADTs is getting longer ... and C-ID⁴ review times are longer still...**[threatening] timely and accurate catalog publication and availability of ADT programs for students.”

Finally, some colleges, especially those that struggle to recruit faculty that meet MQs, find some ADTs to be redundant. For example, they do not see the benefit from developing every Social Justice ADT when “Social Justice Studies: General is accepted by most CSUs for their Chicana/o/x Studies, Asian American, Native American, and African American Studies majors.” In another example, one college states that “most of the Economics requirements are also in the Business ADT, and students prefer the Business ADT.”

SUMMARY OF QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

Many ADTs are serving students well at many California community colleges. However, a thoughtful analysis of the qualitative responses to the Assessment of ADT Offerings Survey reveals that colleges—especially rural-serving colleges—are struggling to incorporate ADTs in relevant, accessible, and sustainable ways that serve the needs of all students, transfer destinations, and campus employees. Due to colleges’ specific regional concerns—local workforce and community, resource constraints, impacted transfer destinations, potentially no transfer destinations, and faculty staffing issues—they struggle to implement and maintain many ADTs.

⁴ Learn more about C-ID here: <https://c-idsystem.org>.