



PERFORMANCE AUDIT REPORT

Transferring Courses To Regents' Universities

**A Report to the Legislative Post Audit Committee
By the Legislative Division of Post Audit
State of Kansas
January 1986**

Legislative Post Audit Committee

Legislative Division of Post Audit

THE LEGISLATIVE POST Audit Committee and its audit agency, the Legislative Division of Post Audit, are the audit arm of Kansas government. The programs and activities of State government now cost about \$5 billion a year. As legislators and administrators try increasingly to allocate tax dollars effectively and make government work more efficiently, they need information to evaluate the work of governmental agencies. The audit work performed by Legislative Post Audit helps provide that information.

We conduct our audit work in accordance with applicable government auditing standards set forth by the U.S. General Accounting Office. These standards pertain to the auditor's professional qualifications, the quality of the audit work, and the characteristics of professional and meaningful reports. The standards also have been endorsed by the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants and adopted by the Legislative Post Audit Committee.

The Legislative Post Audit Committee is a bipartisan committee comprising five senators and five representatives. Of the Senate members, three are appointed by the President of the Senate and two are appointed by the Senate Minority Leader. Of the Representatives, three are appointed by the Speaker of the House and two are appointed by the Minority Leader.

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OBTAINING AUDIT INFORMATION

This audit was conducted by Ellyn Rullestad, Senior Auditor, and Cindy Denton, Auditor, of the Division's staff. If you need additional information about the audit's findings, please contact Ms. Rullestad at the Division's offices.

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TRANSFERRING COURSES TO REGENTS' UNIVERSITIES

Summary of Legislative Post Audit's Findings

In 1980, the Legislative Division of Post Audit conducted an audit of the transfer of community college courses to Regents' universities. The legislative concern was that courses were not transferring as intended. The audit found that 10 percent of the students' credit hours did not transfer to Regents' universities in 1977. Recently, legislative concerns have been raised about whether the recommendations made in the 1980 audit have been implemented and whether any other changes have been in the transfer process. To address these concerns, Legislative Post Audit was directed to examine the steps taken by the Department of Education and the Board of Regents to implement the 1980 audit recommendations.

What steps have been taken in recent years to improve the transferability of courses from community colleges to Regents' universities? The 1980 audit made recommendations for improving the transfer process in two areas: formalizing the transfer process and increasing the information available to community college students. To formalize the transfer process, the 1980 audit made two recommendations. First, the Department of Education should promulgate an administrative regulation clearly defining the programs offered by community colleges. Second, the transfer and articulation agreement should be made mandatory for all community colleges and Regents' universities. Neither of these recommendations has been implemented.

To increase the information available to community college students, the 1980 audit recommended that the Department require community colleges to identify remedial and vocational-type courses in their course catalogs. It also recommended that a course equivalency guide, modeled on a similar guide developed in Arizona, be developed for Kansas students. These recommendations also have not been implemented.

The auditors concluded that no significant changes have been made in the transfer process but that, in general, the problem does not appear to be a large one. The auditors also found that considerable information is available to students through community college advisors.

TRANSFERRING COURSES TO REGENTS' UNIVERSITIES

At its October 22, 1985, meeting, the Legislative Post Audit Committee directed the Legislative Division of Post Audit to update an audit issued by the Division in 1980. The earlier audit, The Community Junior College System, Part II: The Transfer of Courses to Regents' Universities, found that about 10 percent of the community college transfer students' courses did not transfer to fulfill their university graduation requirements. The audit made a number of recommendations to improve the transfer process.

Legislative concerns have been raised about whether any of the recommendations have been implemented and whether any other changes have been made in the transfer process since the 1980 audit.

The audit addresses the following question:

1. What steps have been taken in recent years to improve the transferability of courses from community colleges to Regents' universities?

To answer this question, the auditors reviewed earlier Legislative Post Audit work relating to community college course transfers as well as current course transfer policies. They interviewed officials from the Department of Education and the Board of Regents. They also interviewed admissions officers from a sample of community colleges and Regents' universities.

In general, the auditors found that no significant changes have been made in the transfer process. Both the Department of Education and the Board of Regents said they thought the transfer process was working satisfactorily.

Following a brief description of Legislative Post Audit's earlier audit and follow-up work, the remainder of the audit addresses the question listed above.

A 1980 Audit Reviewed the Transferability of Courses From Community Colleges to Regents' Universities

The 1980 audit, The Community Junior College System, Part II: The Transfer of Courses to Regents' Universities, was conducted in response to legislative concerns that not all community college courses were transferring as intended to the Regents' universities. The audit was the second of a two-part series examining the community college system.

In general, the Kansas Board of Education is responsible for determining, in consultation with the Board of Regents, that courses offered at community colleges are at the freshman and sophomore level before they can be approved for State aid. By requiring the Board of Education to ensure that the colleges' academic courses are comparable to those offered by the universities, the Legislature also made the Board responsible for ensuring that such courses are eligible to transfer on an equivalent basis.

To make it easier for community college students to transfer coursework to a Regents' university, a transfer and articulation agreement was developed by the Board of Regents, the Department of Education, and the universities and community colleges. This

agreement, which took effect in the fall 1977 semester, provides that students who meet the requirements set forth in the agreement are guaranteed that 30 hours of lower-division general educational requirements will be transferred to a Regents' university. In addition, the student covered by the agreement will transfer with junior class standing even if the student loses credit hours in the transfer process.

Other steps to provide greater coordination between the colleges and universities in the transfer process include the use of course equivalency sheets and student information programs. Course equivalency sheets, which are developed by each Regents' university, indicate how various community college courses are treated at the university. Student information programs include such activities as "community college day" at the Regents' universities.

Ten Percent of the Community College Transfer Students' Credit Hours Did Not Transfer to Regents' Universities in 1977

Most of those hours did not transfer for reasons in keeping with established policies - the number of hours exceeded the elective hours allowed within a degree program, courses were not intended to transfer, and the like. However, about one-fourth of the hours that did not transfer (2.6 percent of the total credit hours) apparently should have because the credit hours were for approved academic, college-level offerings that transferred in many cases.

The 1980 audit also found that even though most credit hours did transfer, problems existed in the transfer process. For example, more than one-third of the community college transfer students lost credit hours for courses that apparently should have transferred. Also, there were widespread differences in the treatment of courses by the various Regents' universities. Finally, the audit found that the course equivalency sheets were not immediately accessible to community college students. Recommendations to improve the transfer process were made in two main areas:

1. Formalizing the transfer process
2. Increasing the information available to community college students

In Response to the Audit, the Agencies Indicated That No Changes Would Be Made in the Transfer Process

The Department of Education and the Board of Regents responded to the audit. Both indicated they thought the transfer process generally worked well. Neither group indicated it would initiate major changes in the transfer process.

In May 1982, Legislative Post Audit issued a follow-up report on audit recommendations, including those made in the 1980 audit. The auditors found that legislation had been introduced to develop a course equivalency guide to make it easier for community college students to determine how the various Regents' universities would treat their courses. This legislation did not pass. The auditors found that the other recommendations in the earlier audit had not been implemented. The remainder of this report describes the current transfer policies and the steps that have been taken to improve the transfer process since 1982.

What Steps Have Been Taken in Recent Years To Improve the Transferability of Courses From Community Colleges to Regents' Universities?

To answer this question, the auditors interviewed officials with the Department of Education and the Board of Regents to determine what steps have been taken to improve course transferability. They also interviewed admissions officials at a sample of community colleges and Regents' universities to learn about current transfer policies. They focused on those actions taken to address the recommendations for formalizing the transfer process and increasing the information available to college students.

Recommendations to Formalize the Transfer Process

The 1980 audit made two recommendations designed to help formalize the transfer process.

1. **The Department of Education should promulgate an administrative regulation clearly defining the programs offered by community colleges.** The Department previously had an administrative regulation that identified the community college programs and addressed the issue of transferability of courses to Regents' universities. In 1979, this regulation was revoked and similar information was placed in the State Plan for community colleges. The State Plan does not carry the same force of law as an administrative regulation.
2. **The transfer and articulation agreement should be made mandatory for all community colleges and Regents' universities.** The 1980 audit found that at least one community college had not signed the agreement and that two others had signed the agreement but did not participate in the program.

Based on their interviews, the auditors determined that neither recommendation has been implemented.

The Department of Education has not yet promulgated an administrative regulation governing community college course offerings. According to officials from the Department of Education, the State Plan for community colleges, in conjunction with the transfer and articulation agreement, serves the function of the previous administrative regulation. The entire transfer process is currently being examined by the Council of Directors and Deans of Instruction from the community colleges and the Council of Chief Academic Officers from the Regents' universities, but neither group has plans to promulgate an administrative regulation.

Johnson County Community College still has not signed the transfer and articulation agreement. According to officials from the college, Johnson County Community College did not participate in the agreement when it was first developed because the college had no degree requirements. Since that time, the college has established degree requirements and developed extensive course guides which describe how various courses will be treated by the Regents' universities. Written agreements are executed between the college and the various Regents' universities that state how specific community college courses will be treated. According to the admissions officials, the college does not feel the need for the agreement.

No current plans exist to require all colleges and universities to participate in the transfer and articulation agreement. Officials from both the Board of Regents and the Department of Education indicated they thought the agreement was working well.

Recommendations to Increase the Information Available to Community College Students

The following recommendations were directed towards the Department of Education and suggested ways that community college students could be better informed about the transfer of courses to Regents' universities.

- 1. The Department of Education should require community colleges to identify remedial courses in their course catalogs.** In the earlier audit, several courses did not transfer because they were identified as being high school level or remedial courses by some of the Regents' universities. By identifying remedial courses in the community college catalogs, students can have more information about whether or not a particular course will transfer for credit.
- 2. The Department of Education should require community colleges to identify vocational-type courses in their course catalogs.** Some courses did not transfer to all universities because they were vocational rather than academic courses. Again, identifying vocational-type courses in the community college catalog would provide students with more information about the likelihood of a particular course transferring.
- 3. A course equivalency guide, modeled on a similar guide developed in Arizona, should be developed for Kansas students.** The earlier audit found that the course equivalency sheets that were used by community colleges to determine course transferability were cumbersome and not immediately accessible to all students. A course equivalency guide was recommended because it would provide community college students readily accessible information on course transfer policies.

Remedial courses are not required to be identified in community college catalogs. In its response to the 1980 audit, the Department of Education said, "In the future, all community junior college catalogs will specifically identify remedial courses (through Rules and Regulations) and students will be advised of the nature of said courses prior to enrollment." This has not yet been done. In response to the 1982 follow-up report, the Department indicated that it "failed to identify" any approved community college courses that were high school level courses.

The Department recently sent a memo to the community college presidents discouraging them from granting credit for remedial or developmental courses. Also, a task force is being formed with members from both the Department of Education and the Council of Presidents to discuss what should be done to address the question of remedial or developmental courses. The group is currently working to develop a clear definition of remedial or developmental courses.

Vocational-type courses are also not required to be labeled as such in community college catalogs. The Department of Education has no plans to mandate community colleges to indicate that a certain course is vocational in nature and may or may not transfer to a particular Regents' university.

No additional attempts have been made to develop a course equivalency guide. Officials of both the Board of Regents and the Department of Education indicated that the existing course equivalency sheets were a more preferred solution. The reasons given were that the sheets could be updated more easily than a printed guide and that the guide would always be out of date. The Department of Education also indicated that some community colleges had their own course equivalency guides, although some were more extensive than others.

Information on course transfers from community colleges to Regents' universities is available to college officials and students. During interviews with community college officials the auditors were told that extensive course transfer information is available to community college admissions officials. In general, community colleges receive course transfer information on equivalency sheets sent from the Regents' universities. Equivalency sheets state the college course and the university course it is equivalent to.

Information is also collected in other ways. Several of the community colleges have written agreements with some of the Regents' universities about how specific community college courses will transfer to the various university departments. For example, Garden City Community College contacts various university departments to determine the transferability of new courses. If the university accepts the course as equivalent to one of its own courses, written verification of its transferability is sent to the community college. The community college officials also indicated that the universities keep the colleges informed about the status of courses. Johnson County Community College has created a full-time position to deal with the articulation of courses. That college spends a substantial amount of time communicating with the universities. Some of the smaller colleges said that the equivalency sheets and a few phone calls, when necessary, are all that was needed for them to facilitate course transfers.

The colleges provide course transfer information to students in two basic ways. The community college student's key source of information is the college advisor. In general, advisors have a complete listing of the course equivalency sheets, as well as information compiled by the admissions staff, to aid them in counseling. Some colleges have information available for the students in a printed form. For example, Johnson County Community College has more than 100 program sheets available to students outlining major fields of study and the courses required, course equivalents, and the transferability of each course to various universities in Kansas. Three other colleges provide copies of the relevant portions of the equivalency sheets to students to help them determine the transferability of their courses.

A June 1985 study, sponsored by groups from both Regents' universities and community colleges, was conducted to gather information about students transferring to Regents' universities from community colleges. The study found that "students did not report major difficulties in transferring from the community college to the university, suffering only small losses in non-transferable credit hours." In fact, students reported that they lost, on average, 3.2 credit hours. This contrasts with the findings of the 1980 audit in which students lost, on average, 8.7 credit hours.

Follow-up work to the June 1985 study is also being conducted. Among other things, this research will include an analysis of a sample of transfer student records to study comparative persistence and graduation rates between transfer and native students. The group is also initiating a study of community college students to systematically follow a

selected group of students for five years to determine academic success, factors affecting success, attendance patterns, and the like.

Conclusion

No significant changes have been made in the transfer process. The problem of courses not transferring does not appear to be large and, based on some recent studies, it may be diminishing. It is not possible to determine whether the transfer problems identified in the 1980 audit have been overcome or lessened without conducting further work. To do this, individual student transcripts would need to be examined. The Regents' universities do not compile information on the numbers of community college courses that do not transfer in any semester or on the number of Regents' courses that do not transfer from one university to another.

APPENDIX A
Agency Response



Kansas State Department of Education

Kansas State Education Building

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Office of the Commissioner

December 30, 1985



Mr. Meredith Williams
Legislative Post Auditor
109 West Ninth, Suite 301
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Dear Mr. Williams:

The Kansas State Department of Education appreciates the excellent job the Division of Post Audit has done on reviewing the transferability of community colleges to Regents' universities. I and members of my staff have reviewed the draft copy of the audit report and find that the content generally reflects the transferability of courses as that situation now exists. Since transferability policy tends to change with or without constant monitoring, you may be assured that we will exercise even greater care as to the impact of those transfer policies. The average credit hour loss of 3.2, even though small compared to the large number of hours of total enrollment of those transferred, will be subject to continued scrutiny. In our judgment, policies regarding transfers now in place are appropriate but must be assessed annually as to their effects.

We thank you for the work done by your audit team.

Sincerely yours,

Harold Blackburn
Commissioner of Education

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