

# The Interstate Passport: A New Framework for Transfer

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The Interstate Passport Initiative ([www.wiche.edu/passport](http://www.wiche.edu/passport)) is designed to address two important issues that support the interests of our increasingly mobile students: streamlining their transfer pathways to degree completion and ensuring the quality of their educational experience. Equally important, the Passport does it in a way unencumbered by special interests and undue complexity.

Today's students are caught in a transfer system designed for an earlier era when very few students changed institutions. A recent study conducted by the National Student Clearinghouse\* tells us that more than 33 percent of students transfer and of those, approximately 27 percent cross state lines. A number of states have improved the intrastate transfer experience, especially for associate degree students. But there is still work to do for students transferring across state lines and for students transferring at an earlier point in their studies when we know they are most likely to stop out. How can we provide students with the same access to transfer outside and between states that many states have or are looking to deploy inside states? How can this be accomplished without usurping faculty authority? How can we maintain or even enhance the quality of the educational program?

The leadership of the Western Alliance of Community College Academic Leaders ([www.wiche.edu/alliance](http://www.wiche.edu/alliance)) (the Alliance), whose members are the chief academic officers at two-year institutions in the 16 western states and territories of the WICHE region, asked these and other questions as they began to imagine a way to accelerate transfer and completion without sacrificing academic quality. In addition, these leaders wanted to “take bold action” instead of the continuing “slow crawl” toward progress on these issues.

As they examined current articulation agreements at public two- and four-year institutions, which are based on courses and credits, Alliance members found that these agreements look like the routing maps in in-flight magazines: hundreds of lines crisscrossing and overlapping in a maze of bureaucracy. The question arose: Why can't we have a new framework for transfer — one based not on courses and credits, but on learning outcomes, especially in general education? With participation from some of the members of the Western Academic Leadership Forum ([www.wiche.edu/forum](http://www.wiche.edu/forum)) — composed of the provosts of the four-year institutions and related system and state agencies in the WICHE region — the Interstate Passport Initiative began to take shape, with a focus on fleshing out a learning outcomes-based block transfer of general education across state lines and fueled by a standing agreement between institutions in multiple states.

Upon completion of the pilot or Phase I of the project, institutions in four states — Hawaii, North Dakota, Oregon, and Utah — signed the Passport agreement, with others interested in joining. Guided by the Liberal Education

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and America's Promise (LEAP) Essential Learning Outcomes (ELOs) developed by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (a partner in the initiative), faculty from institutions in the participating states convened in Boulder, Colorado, in fall 2012 for a tuning exercise in three lower-division general education areas: written communication, oral communication, and quantitative literacy. The outcome of this work was the Passport Learning Outcomes (PLOs) for Phase I. In addition, faculty from these institutions developed the Passport Transfer Level Proficiency Criteria which identify multiple ways that students can demonstrate transfer level proficiency with the learning outcomes.

Since the Passport relies on a competency- and outcomes-based mapping activity, it does not take into account particular courses, credit hours, or seat time. The Passport focus is on outcomes that are designed and approved by faculty. How a Passport institution imparts and assesses students' proficiency with these outcomes is the business of that institution's faculty. Faculty must ensure that their learning outcomes are equivalent to and congruent with the Passport Learning Outcomes and that they will award the Passport to students meeting the proficiency criteria for transfer. In addition, faculty is asked to supply a list of courses and other learning opportunities that address the PLOs as their institution's Passport block. Students who earn a Passport and transfer to another Passport institution will not be required to repeat any courses or other requirements in the receiving institution's Passport block, even if the number of credits is different.

In addition to "mapping" to the PLOs, the initiative has another important feature of quality assurance: tracking academic progress of Passport students at receiving institutions. Developed by registrars and institutional researchers from the participating institutions, the tracking process determines whether proficiency with the Passport Learning Outcomes produces Passport students that are as academically successful as non-Passport transfer students in the two terms after transfer. Passport institutions submit data on their transfer students to the Passport's Central Data Repository at Utah State University, which sorts the data and forwards reports to the sending institutions about the academic progress of their Passport students compared to non-Passport students at the receiving institutions. This information can help inform an institution's continuous improvement efforts and provides an aggregate view of the Passport's performance.

With Phase I complete, other WICHE states and institutions can now apply for Passport status. Providing oversight for the Passport is a Passport Review Board, consisting of representatives from each participating state, which will monitor the operation of the Passport, consider modifications, and process new applications for Passport status.

Once funding is secured, work on the Passport's Phase II block will commence to define – again, building on AAC&U's LEAP ELOs — learning outcomes and proficiency criteria for transfer for the remaining academic areas in lower-division general education. When that work is complete, the initiative will be ripe for expansion beyond the WICHE region.

## Reference

National Student Clearinghouse. (2012). *Transfer & mobility: A national view of pre-degree student movement in postsecondary institutions*. Herndon, VA.

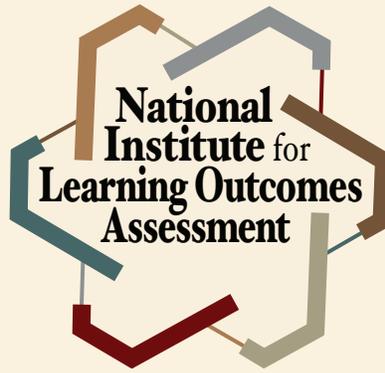
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