

ACSA EDUCATION COMMITTEE

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# ACSA Transfer Toolkit: Best Practices for Facilitating Community College Transfer

ASSOCIATION OF COLLEGIATE  
SCHOOLS OF ARCHITECTURE

# Table of Contents

# S T R A T E G I C C O N T E N T S

## 01.

Advocating for Community College Transfer: A Strategic Overview

## 02.

Getting Started : Establishing Essential Infrastructure

## 03.

Addressing Challenges : Streamlining the Transfer Process

## 04.

Strategies for Recruiting Community College Transfer Students : Best Practices

## 05.

Supporting and Retaining Transfer Students: Best Practices

## 06.

Transfer-Friendly Checklist: A Practical Guide for Schools

## 07.

Measuring Impact: Metrics and Evaluation

## 08.

Resource Hub: Links and Acknowledgement

# 01. Advocating for Community College Transfer: A Strategic Overview

As open enrollment institutions, community college architecture programs are an accessible and affordable entry point into architectural education. Community colleges are inherently positioned to foster diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) within the architectural field by providing entry points for students from diverse ethnic, socioeconomic, and age backgrounds who might otherwise lack opportunities to pursue architectural studies. Upon transferring to four-year and accredited schools, these students enrich and strengthen the learning environment by contributing readiness, focus, and a mix of prior learning experiences, perspectives, and innovative design approaches.

Implementing a seamless transfer pathway from community college architecture programs to your institution will bolster enrollment by providing access to a pool of qualified, motivated traditional and nontraditional students. Among these individuals are those who may have delayed college matriculation, attend classes part-time, maintain full-time employment, are financially independent, care for dependents other than a spouse, or bring diverse life experiences. Embracing these nontraditional students will enrich the educational landscape with a myriad of perspectives, fortify enrollment figures, ensure program longevity, and elevate the vitality, scope, and relevance of the architecture discipline.

## **Why create clearer community college pathways?**

- Foster equitable access to architectural education and the profession.
- Address the cost barriers associated with architectural education.
- Recognize students as deserving of a fair, transparent, and equitable transfer process.
- Confront disciplinary elitism and exclusion while encouraging and valuing diversity at your institution.
- Broaden pathways for inclusion and belonging in higher education, amplifying the enriched conversations, cultures, and experiences that transfer students bring to university studio culture.



### **DID YOU KNOW?**

**Less than 30%** of ACSA member schools have a direct contact listed on their website for potential community college transfer students.

Source: 2022 ACSA Education Committee Survey

## 02. Getting Started : Establishing Essential Infrastructure

The infrastructure needed to support community college transfer spans people, space, equipment, events, funding and communication. This work requires a desire and commitment on behalf of the institution to dedicate time, people and resources to pursue developing a transfer infrastructure. Working within your institution to understand and implement transfer policies as well as outreach and relationship building between the community colleges and university architecture programs is a key component to success. This work may also include reaching high schools to develop K-18 pathways that include community college architecture programs as a viable alternative.

### ACTION ITEMS



- > Host an internal, institutional, convening with key stakeholders to strategize, map out, and implement community college transfer initiatives.
- > Promote dialog and encourage exchange with local community colleges to foster collaboration and partnership.
  - Invite community college representatives into the conversation.
  - Encourage university faculty to participate in community college reviews and vice versa.
  - Invite community college students to participate in university events.
  - Include stakeholders in the planning process that can represent the best interests of the architecture department at each institution.
- > Gather data to demonstrate community college transfer success. Show examples of institutions where this has worked.
- > Identify a transfer faculty member, staff, or administrator to lead the development of this infrastructure and the parallel drafting of articulation agreements.
- > Create a one-page map or document communicating a clear path forward to enhance community college transfer at your institution. Consider details such as timelines, partners, and funding sources.
- > Develop clear website transfer information that is easily accessible and reviewable by potential transfer students.
- > Develop a mentoring program. This may include coordination with student groups, community colleges, the university, and local AIA chapters. This program could also support other student populations if desired.

### 03. Addressing Challenges : Streamlining the Transfer Process

Overcoming transfer obstacles is one of the primary hurdles institutions face when developing and streamlining transfer agreements. Effective collaboration among stakeholders is essential for success in identifying and addressing barriers to community college transfers, including issues like schedule flexibility, scholarships, and anti-bias training. It is critical to establish a culture of trust between institutions and work proactively to address obstacles. Below is a summary of common transfer challenges and potential solutions to overcome them.

**Obstacle: Studio Placement.** The design curricula at community colleges and the portfolios of transfer students may be perceived as inadequate, potentially leading to difficulties in securing favorable placement upon transfer. To address this:

- Share curriculum and resources between institutions.
- Communicate clear portfolio expectations and develop a rubric for objective evaluation and feedback.
- Provide informed advising to help students navigate the transfer process.
- Offer bridge, online/asynchronous 'micro' courses or tutorials to address skills gaps and advance placement.
- Increase faculty exchanges amongst community college and university programs for studio reviews and portfolio critiques.
- Align learning outcomes and identify measures beyond the portfolio.

**Obstacle: Curriculum Alignments / Gaps.** When class learning objectives and curriculum are not aligned, it creates gaps in transfer student transcripts, presenting a significant obstacle. To tackle this:

- Introduce curriculum flexibility by considering non-sequential or flexible studio and course sequences, and utilize a block transfer model instead of a one-to-one course equivalency, potentially adopting a "seamless" transfer model based on completion of the two-year degree.
- Evaluate learning outcomes holistically rather than course by course.
- Implement articulation agreements that identify, map, and communicate unavoidable gaps.
- Assign transfer students to a university architecture advisor who understands the transfer process and can help students navigate curriculum alignment.
- Develop online/asynchronous 'micro' courses or tutorials for missing skills and/or credits.
- Consider demonstrated competency to fulfill missing credits, i.e., classified as 'prior learning' transfer credit.



#### DID YOU KNOW?

**Over 70%** of ACSA members surveyed said that when studio credit is not given, the community college design curriculum or portfolios are the barrier.

Source: 2022 ACSA Education Committee Survey



#### DID YOU KNOW?

**Less than 50%** of ACSA member schools have architecture specific transfer information posted on their websites for potential transfer students to review.

Source: 2022 ACSA Education Committee Survey

## 04. Strategies for Recruiting Community College Transfer Students: Best Practices

Being strategic and intentional about cross-functional recruitment processes is a vital step toward expanding access to architectural education and may require a cultural shift in your department. Engaged recruiting based on ongoing and authentic relationship building between institutions, faculty and prospective students will benefit this process.

Institutions should prioritize offering comprehensive support to prospective students. This approach not only facilitates their admission journey but also bolsters the institution's reputation. Demonstrating a commitment to student well-being is crucial for community colleges to establish trust and attract interest.

Moreover, colleges should actively promote diverse support services during the recruitment phase. Adopting a multifaceted strategy to aid student success encompasses initiatives ranging from admissions guidance to academic tutoring and counseling.

### ACTION ITEMS



- > Establish relationships with your local community colleges.
- > Visit community college studios and identify where alignments can occur.
- > Meet with community college architecture students for recruitment. (Include advisors from the community college and university in the process of meeting students).
- > Consider cross-institutional events to build partnerships.
- > Post clear and easy-to-find transfer information on your website.
- > Maintain and update transfer agreements on a regular cycle and keep patterns and agreements current.

## 05. Supporting and Retaining Transfer Students: Best Practices

After successfully transferring, students may still encounter obstacles. These can range from financial issues to belonging and acceptance, and navigating a new institutional culture. Supporting transfer students post-matriculation is an essential part of a successful transfer infrastructure.

It is imperative to reduce the burden on transfer students by improving communication, offering summer on-ramping, and creating collaborative studios in the first semester. Systemic changes may need to happen to shift faculty biases about the transfer student performance. Institutional approaches need to understand that advanced studio placement is integral for supporting community college transfer students. The first-semester transition can be the toughest and is the point where the most support is required, including software, shop, and other training to ease the integration process. Transfer student retention is best served by supporting students through this acclimation period.

### ACTION ITEMS



#### **Acceptance and Belonging Support**

- > Educate faculty, staff and students about the transfer process and expectations to address biases, and set expectations.
- > Provide clear communication and upfront acknowledgment of transfer placements.
- > Consider developing affinity groups for transfer students. Establish a mentorship program or studio orientation program for transferring community college students.
- > Develop an intentional mentorship program for incoming transfer students (with students, faculty, staff, or alumni).
- > Initiate activities, early in the transfer acclimation period, to build a sense of belonging (e.g., facilitating socializing, engagement, and involvement early in the first semester).
- > Promote an inclusive studio culture to help transfer students find belonging and solidarity with existing university students, particularly in their first studio.
- > Provide opportunities to complete any required training (shop training, etc.) for transfer students prior to project deadlines.
- > Connect transfer students to AIAS, NOMAS and other groups on campus.

## ACTION ITEMS CONTINUED



### **Financial Support**

- > Provide transfer scholarships for community college students and help connect students to resources that might benefit them.
- > Work with financial aid to find supplements to lab fees that can be built into classes for financial aid coverage support for printing and material costs.
- > Explore grant opportunities to provide additional financial support, software, or training for transfer students.
- > Provide opportunities for campus employment.
- > Connect transfer students with internships and/or seek out firm sponsorships.
- > Extend curriculum patterns (i.e., into summer) or consider less hierarchical course sequences to allow students to balance work and coursework.



## 06. Transfer Friendly Checklist: A Practical Guide for Universities

The ACSA education committee has adopted the term “transfer friendly” to recognize institutions that demonstrate transparent and welcoming transfer policies.

Are you a transfer friendly architecture program? Do you aspire to become a more transfer friendly institution? What constitutes transfer friendly? Use this checklist to self-assess your progress.

### A Transfer Friendly Architecture program...

- Credit and Placement:** Awards credit (and placement) for community college coursework, covering both general education and discipline-specific architecture coursework. Makes a sincere effort to grant transfer students the highest advanced placement based on their transcript, coursework, and skill level.
- Studio Placement:** Recognizes and awards advanced studio placement for community college design studio coursework.
- Articulation Agreements:** Establishes written articulation agreements or clearly defined transfer patterns (pathways) available for potential transfer students to review.
- Website:** Posts discipline (architecture) specific information regarding transfer for review on your website. This includes a contact person for potential transfer students and relevant information regarding transfer requirements.
- Prioritize Progression:** Ensures that community college transfer students keep moving forward on their pathway towards an architecture degree and does not require transfer students to repeat prior coursework.
- Acceptance:** Accepts transfer students into a professional or pre-professional degree track.
- Establish Dialog:** Seeks, fosters and maintains relationships with community college architecture programs and regularly reviews transfer agreements.
- Transition Support:** Provides specific transfer student support, mentoring, and specialized advising for transfer students. Connects transfer students to AIAS, NOMAS, and other groups on campus to enhance school culture.

## 07. Measuring Impact: Metrics and Evaluation

*In ten years can we prove that this initiative has increased the diversity of the profession and those pursuing licensure?*

There is ample anecdotal evidence that community college transfer students thrive in architecture programs and go on to rich and varied professional careers. However, data on all architecture students' educational and career paths is not widely available. Establishing robust data on transfer student success could facilitate a shift toward valuing the community college transfer pathway as well as identifying existing biases in the process.

Existing financial and policy models do not incentivize four-year and five-year architecture programs to accept transfer students due to tuition models and retention demands. A way forward is to document transfer success and position architecture schools as leaders in making public education accessible to as many students as possible. Impact metrics are needed to demonstrate that a robust community college transfer agreement is worth pursuing.

Consider tracking transfer student cohort success compared to the cohort that began at the university. Evaluate what percentage graduate, what percentage becomes licensed, what non-architectural paths they follow. **Testimonials and storytelling can be assets but alone are not enough.**

### ACTION ITEMS



- > Track metrics to demonstrate that community college transfer students have a high likelihood of success and add diversity of perspectives to the institution. ( For example, graduation rates, licensure rates, diversity in career paths, retention rates, participation in professional organizations, representation in design competitions, post-graduation survey responses, academic performance, involvement in mentorship programs, employment placement rates)
- > Identify who tracks this information and create a plan to share the data.
- > Avoid relying solely on anecdotal evidence and use data to measure and assess.
- > Measure academic success, retention rate, and completion rate data for traditional versus community college transfer paths.
- > Use this newly acquired transfer friendly data to promote your program.

## 08. Resources Hub: Links and Acknowledgement

Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture (ACSA): [www.acsa-arch.org](http://www.acsa-arch.org)

Coalition of Community College Architecture Programs (CCCAP): [www.cccap.org](http://www.cccap.org)

Sample Articulation Agreement: <https://bit.ly/3xu0V55>

### **ACSA Webinars**

Expanding Access to Architectural Education Part I: Working with Community Colleges, October 2021

<https://www.acsa-arch.org/webinars/expanding-access-to-architectural-education-working-with-community-colleges/>

Expanding Access to Architectural Education Part II: Transfer Relationships, November 2021

<https://www.acsa-arch.org/webinars/expanding-access-to-architectural-education-transfer-relationships/>

Expanding Access to Architectural Education Part III: Stakeholders Planning Meeting, November 2022

<https://www.acsa-arch.org/webinars/expanding-access-to-architectural-education-part-iii-stakeholders-planning-meeting/>

### **Acknowledgment**

This document is the outcome of work initially begun at the ACSA 2023 Convening to Advance Community College Transfer and Articulation in Architectural Education. This first-of-its-kind community college convening was hosted at Thomas Jefferson University in Philadelphia in June of 2023. Over 70+ attendees representing Community Colleges, Universities, and Alliance Organizations worked collaboratively over this two-day conference to produce initial drafts of a transfer toolkit. The culmination of this initial work is reflected in this document. The ACSA Education Committee would like to recognize convening attendees for their contributions to this publication.

<https://www.acsa-arch.org/conference/convening/>

## **ACSA Education Committee Members 2021 - 2024**

This document also reflects the work of three ACSA education committees that have been charged to work on community college pathways initiatives for the past three academic years.

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# 9 STEPS

## TO DEVELOP AN ARTICULATION AGREEMENT



1

### IDENTIFY

partner programs and shared goals.

2

**ESTABLISH**  
transfer course alignments.



3

### CONSIDER

blocks or groups of courses to align learning outcomes when curriculum gaps occur.



4

### CONSIDER

flexibility to address curriculum gaps and advance placement. (Look holistically at the both first two years curriculum. Find common ground and align learning outcomes to avoid the credit hour matching trap.)



5

### CLARIFY

general education requirements necessary for advanced placement. (Math is critical.)



6

### SPECIFY

transfer portfolio requirements. (if necessary)

7

### UNDERSTAND

the signature and approval process and timelines for both institutions.



8

### SIGN

the agreement.



9

### COMMUNICATE

revisit, update and keep current as necessary.

