

IMPROVING STUDENT PATHWAYS

The Texas Transfer Framework

BACKGROUND

Substantially improving transfer is a central priority for the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board and Commissioner Harrison Keller, particularly for students attending community colleges who plan to transfer to a public four-year university.

State policy mechanisms available for the agency and institutions to improve transfer were strengthened during the 86th Texas Legislative Session (2019) with the passage of Senate Bill 25 (SB 25). SB 25 included several important provisions to improve transfer in Texas, including recommended course sequences, earlier filing of degree plans, and new reporting on nontransferable credit. To build upon the momentum created by SB 25, the Coordinating Board convened a small, informal workgroup early in 2020 called the Improving Texas Transfer Workgroup, which was comprised of an equal number of representatives from public two- and four-year institutions.

Workgroup members met regularly beginning in April 2020 to study and make recommendations to improve vertical transfer and the applicability of credit for students in Texas' public higher education institutions. The workgroup's aims were to work collaboratively to develop recommendations that would: (1) substantially improve vertical transfer; (2) substantially improve the applicability of credit to a major; and (3) reduce excess semester credit hours. The Improving Texas Transfer Workgroup examined several other states' approaches to vertical transfer and closely reviewed existing Texas transfer resources such as the Texas Core Curriculum, Field of Study Curriculum, and the Academic Course Guide Manual (ACGM), among others. This helped them develop ideas and recommendations to make vertical transfer more transparent and student-friendly.

The workgroup began by establishing design principles that would provide guidance in discussions and a framework for developing recommendations.

Principle 1 (Shared Responsibility): Both community colleges and universities share equal responsibility for an efficient transfer framework.

Principle 2 (Transparency/Student-Centric Academic Pathways): The transfer framework must be seamless and transparent for students.

Principle 3 (Optimizing Courses Applying Upon Transfer): The transfer framework must optimize the number of courses/credits applicable to the major upon transfer to a university.

Principle 4 (Process): The transfer framework shall be developed through a transparent process that involves all institutions participating in a formal venue to identify and to endorse mechanisms for efficient transfer.

Principle 5 (Full-Scale Implementation): The mechanisms of the transfer framework must be adhered to by all institutions. A formal venue will be sustained for post-implementation oversight.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE TRANSFER IN TEXAS WORKGROUP RECOMMENDATIONS

Based upon the recommendations of the Improving Transfer in Texas Workgroup, an internal team of Coordinating Board staff developed rules to implement the new Texas Transfer Framework. Staff submitted the proposed rules to the Texas Register in January 2021, and after comments were received, they made revisions to the rules, which were approved by the Board of the THECB March 12, 2021.

TEXAS TRANSFER FRAMEWORK

The Texas Transfer Framework consists of 60 semester credit hours (SCHs) of lower-division courses that a student must complete to earn an associate degree for transfer. This framework aims to optimize the course selections made by students, with the intent that students who complete 60 SCHs will transfer to universities with junior standing in their major, and that as many courses as possible will apply to their selected degree programs.

To achieve the new Transfer Framework, the revised rules in the Texas Administrative Code, Title 19, [Chapter 1, Subchapter V, Sections 1.237-1.243](#), and in Title 19, [Chapter 4, Subchapter B, Sections 4.21-4.36](#), now focus on redefining the Field of Study Curriculum, which now consists of the following components:

Selected Discipline-Specific Texas Core Curriculum courses (an unspecified number of hours*): The Texas Core Curriculum (TCC) consists of 42 semester credit hours (SCH) organized in

nine component areas in broad disciplinary areas. The intent of the Discipline-Specific TCC element of the Field of Study Curriculum is to identify courses in relevant component areas that would both satisfy the student's Texas Core Curriculum requirement and apply to the student's degree program upon transfer.

**The number of Texas Core Curriculum course hours for each major course of study will be determined by the Discipline-Specific Subcommittee and will include only courses relevant for that major.*

Discipline Foundation Courses (up to 12 SCHs): These courses would be comprised of up to 12 SCHs of major-specific courses prescribed for students by the Discipline-Specific Subcommittee. Credit completed in a Discipline Foundation Course (DFC) will apply upon transfer to any public university in the state that offers a corresponding degree program. Credit will be transcribed by the sending institution as completing a requirement in the DFC. All DFC courses must be cross-listed using the Texas Common Course Numbering System (TCCNS) number, especially in student-facing materials. Only courses in the Academic Course Guide Manual (ACGM) are eligible for inclusion. Courses typically taught at the upper division at universities should not be included in a DFC. A course should only be included in a DFC if a critical number of community colleges have the capacity to offer the course.

The Texas Transfer Advisory Committee will ensure each DFC is comprehensively reviewed no less than once every five years and may be reviewed earlier, including upon institutional request (for example, in the case of accreditation changes). The review will include evaluation of data related to student completion of the DFC, applicability of transferred courses to the major of the DFC following transfer, and student success in subsequent courses and in completing majors.

Directed Electives (at least 6 SCHs): Each discipline-specific transfer framework will include at least 6 SCHs of courses that address an individual student's interests and needs. A general academic institution may submit to the Coordinating Board a set of specific, directed-elective courses that are either recommended or required by that institution to ensure students' success in subsequent courses. Students take courses used to fulfill this requirement based on the student's academic interest and university in which they intend to transfer. Only courses in the ACGM are eligible for inclusion. Any courses identified by individual institutions for use toward this requirement must be cross-listed using the TCCNS number, especially in all student-facing materials, and reported to the Coordinating Board.

Prospective transfer students will be supplied with appropriate advising materials to help them make choices that maximize the likelihood of courses in this category transferring to a degree program and applying to a major based on their transfer preferences. The Coordinating Board will develop and maintain a website where students, advisers, and faculty across the state will be able to view the directed electives by institution.

Based upon the new definition of Field of Study Curriculum (FOSC), the following is applicable:

- A student is FOSC-complete when entering with all three of the above blocks complete, which means that receiving institutions **must block-substitute all FOSC courses for all major-specific lower-division requirements** for FOSC-complete students. Students may take additional lower-division courses.
- A student is FOSC-incomplete when entering with partial completion of any blocks, which means that receiving institutions **must substitute any completed FOSC courses** for major-applicable courses but may require additional lower-division coursework in the major.

GOVERNANCE

The **Texas Transfer Advisory Committee (TTAC)** is responsible for overseeing and ensuring consistent review of all parts of the Texas Transfer Framework (including the TCC, DFC, and Directed Electives) and for sharing information. In addition, the TTAC will review relevant data, coordinate the schedule of discipline-specific reviews, recommend DFCs to the Commissioner, and propose changes when institutions indicate an aspect of the framework is not working. The TTAC will work under the design principles that were developed by the Improving Transfer in Texas workgroup.

The TTAC includes faculty and administrators from public institutions, with equal representation from community colleges and universities, as well as student and academic adviser ex-officio representatives. The TTAC will review data provided by the Coordinating Board to assist the committee in determining which disciplinary areas should be considered for development, potentially including data that identifies the most frequent transfer majors, disciplines with the most lost credits, and state priorities when determining which disciplinary areas should be considered for development. The TTAC will also ensure alignment of the TCC with the Texas Transfer Framework to optimize the transferability and applicability of credits and increase transfer students' success within majors. The TTAC will convene the Discipline-Specific Subcommittees on a regular basis and determine whether to adopt recommendations from the various subcommittees.

Adoption of recommendations by the TTAC requires a supermajority of each constituency on the committee (universities and community colleges) to agree to recommend the discipline-specific TCC and DFC set of courses to the Commissioner, who has sole discretion to make the final decision to adopt or reject the proposed curriculum. A set of courses recommended by the TTAC to the Commissioner will be routed by the agency for a 30-day informal notice and comment period to all impacted institutions before the Commissioner's approval or denial of the proposed set of courses. At least annually, the TTAC will report to the Coordinating Board actions recommended over the previous year by the Discipline-Specific Subcommittees, the status of operating subcommittees, and other recommendations as appropriate to improve student transfer and success across the state.

The *Discipline-Specific Subcommittees* will consist of subject-matter experts in each disciplinary area from Texas public higher education institutions, with equal representation from community colleges and universities. These subcommittees will iterate and revise curricula, establish course sequences in the TCC and the DFC that will seamlessly transfer and apply to the program of study in all institutions across the state, and may identify suggested course recommendations for the Directed Electives.

DISPUTE RESOLUTION

If two institutions have a dispute over the applicability of a course within the Texas Transfer Framework, they should try to work through the difference to come to a resolution that will increase the likelihood of students' success in subsequent courses and in their majors. If no resolution is possible, the dispute will be elevated to the Commissioner for a final determination.

PETITIONS FOR ADDITIONAL DFC

One of the key principles guiding the design of the Texas Transfer Framework is that the framework's mechanisms must be transparent to students and adhered to by all institutions. The workgroup recognized that in order to improve transfer and support student success, there should be flexibility within the framework to address students' interests and needs.

After providing written notice and rationale to the TTAC and the Commissioner, an institution's Chief Academic Officer may petition for an additional, institution-specific DFC to be established for a specific major or track within a major. The ability to petition for an alternative DFC is necessary because an institution may determine that their unique curriculum in a specific discipline does not align with the approved DFC. These institutional petitions shall be considered by the TTAC. A recommendation concerning adoption of the alternative DFC will be presented to the Commissioner, including a report and recorded votes by sector. The Commissioner will consider the TTAC report in making a final decision and then inform the Board of the THECB at the next quarterly meeting.

The Coordinating Board will develop and maintain a public website that lists all institutions with approved additional DFCs for majors or tracks within majors, and the related rationale for each additional DFC. Petitioning for an alternative DFC should be a rare occurrence, as defined by the TTAC and in consideration of optimizing student transfer.

CONTINUITY AND CHANGE WITH EXISTING TRANSFER POLICY

The Texas Transfer Framework builds upon the strengths of existing Texas transfer policy while introducing new policies and procedures that substantially improve transfer. In implementing all aspects of this new transfer framework, the Coordinating Board is committed to working in close consultation with institutions.

The Texas Transfer Framework is intended to complement and bolster transfer pathways and cross-institutional partnerships that are student-centric and flexible for students and institutions, particularly through regional collaborations that effectively streamline students' most common transfer pathways. The implementation protects current students who are pursuing existing Field of Study Curriculum while providing paths for current and future students to take advantage of the Texas Transfer Framework.

EXISTING FIELD OF STUDY CURRICULUM

(as of March 1, 2021)

The rules adopted by the Coordinating Board in March 2021 establish a transition period that governs the expiration of the existing Field of Study Curriculum and the teach-out process for students who, on or before Aug. 31, 2022, have earned credit in a Field of Study Curriculum that existed on March 1, 2021. The rules provide the following process:

- Unless repealed or replaced, Field of Study Curriculum in effect as of March 1, 2021, will remain in effect until Aug. 31, 2025, upon which date those Field of Study Curriculum expire by operation of law. For Field of Study Curriculum that are repealed, replaced, or expire by operation of law, the following transition or "teach-out" provisions apply:
 - A student who has earned credit on or before Aug. 31, 2022, in one or more courses included in a Field of Study Curriculum that existed on March 1, 2021, is entitled to complete that Field of Study Curriculum on or before Aug. 31, 2025.
 - A student who has not, on or before Aug. 31, 2022, earned any course credit toward a Field of Study Curriculum in effect on March 1, 2021, is not entitled to transfer credit for that Field of Study Curriculum.
- After an institution's Spring 2026 enrollment deadline, a receiving institution is not required to transfer a complete Field of Study Curriculum that expired before that date. A receiving institution may, at its discretion, choose to accept a complete or partial Field of Study Curriculum that has expired.