



Guiding Principles for Holistic Credit Mobility

EDWorks of Northeast Tennessee

EDWorks Postsecondary Institutions: East Tennessee State University, King University, Milligan University, Tusculum University, Northeast State Community College, Walters State Community College, TCAT Elizabethton, TCAT Morristown.

Thank you to these institutions for their insights and contributions in developing these principles.

Introduction

EDWorks, as a consortium of higher education institutions, has a shared commitment to advancing holistic credit mobility—a system that places students at the center, values their learning wherever it occurs, and ensures clear and efficient pathways to degree completion. These guiding principles reflect the collective belief that collaboration, transparency, and communication are key to student success.

1. COMMUNICATION and MESSAGING

Communication and messaging to students about holistic credit mobility, including choice of major, pathway options, the transfer process, and financial aid and college costs is essential for academic planning and students' decision making. Postsecondary institutions should:

- Design communications to be clear, consistent, student-centered, frequent, and presented in plain language.
- Leverage multiple messaging modes through advising, websites, social media, direct contact (emails, text messages, etc.), outreach events, and marketing to enhance credit mobility and the transfer process.
- Create marketing materials that include simple visual guides.
- Offer to include students' families in communications.
- Begin communication early in the educational path to yield smoother pathways.

2. ARTICULATION AGREEMENTS and PATHWAYS

Articulation agreements and established pathways facilitate holistic credit mobility, make the transfer process smoother, and minimize credit loss. Articulation agreements are most effective when they are clear, transparent, and easily discoverable. The establishment of new articulation

agreements across institutions benefits students and promotes greater credit mobility.

Postsecondary institutions should:

- Acknowledge the large percentage of students who attend more than one college in their careers.
- Review all articulation agreements regularly to maintain a current, comprehensive catalog of these agreements.
- Review articulation agreements with the lead facilitator and academic departments regularly.
- Put supports in place to help students understand the language and expectations of the transfer process and articulation agreements and the need to meet deadlines.
- Use plain language familiar to students and their families when presenting transfer and pathway options.
- Consider the creation of flexible pathway options or meta-majors that allow students to move laterally without losing credits when changing majors. (That is, create a lattice, not a ladder.)
- Assure that the policies regarding catalogs and degree requirements are clear to students and include information about the number of hours needed to graduate for specific programs.
- Maximize the number of credits that can transfer to a major or degree program (degree credit) and minimize the number of non-degree (elective) and excess credits.
- Adhere to accreditation standards when creating articulation agreements.

3. ADVISING and PLANNING

Good advising facilitates holistic credit mobility and is a critical factor for the successful transfer of credits. Advising that begins early in students' college planning best supports credit retention and minimizes credit loss and the duplication of learning. Cross-institutional collaboration in advising strengthens educational pathways, promotes credit mobility, and guides students smoothly through the transfer process. Postsecondary institutions should:

- Support early advising in high school by providing information to ensure that high school counselors, career coaches, and students are well-informed about college pathways, institutional choices, and early postsecondary opportunities.
- Create simple, visual pathways for students to understand course requirements and potential career paths.
- Maintain strong supports through advising after students enroll in college.
- Provide ongoing professional development and updates on pathways and transfer policies to all counselors and advisors.
- Adhere to the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) core values and academic advising core competencies model.
- Seek to overcome capacity barriers in advising, especially heavy caseloads per advisor.

- Provide regular updates to partner institutions on new pathways, courses, articulation agreements, and other related information.
- Coordinate between different types of advisors and systems: In high school: guidance counselors, career coaches, and mentors and advisors from non-profit organizations such as the Ayers Foundation, the Niswonger Foundation, and TN Achieves. In college: TRIO, academic, and faculty advisors.
- Regularly evaluate institutional processes for advising to promote higher levels of efficiency and better levels of service, such as scheduling advising appointments, and increasing the availability of high-demand courses.
- Encourage students to be proactive to seek early and frequent advising.

4. STUDENT-CENTERED CREDIT MOBILITY

Holistic credit mobility should be student-centered with a focus on how students move across institutions and how their learning, wherever it occurs, is valued and recognized. Effective credit mobility depends on the integration of technology, policy, and responsive practice. It validates learning from multiple sources, prevents redundant coursework, strengthens student retention, supports timely degree completion, and promotes overall educational attainment. Postsecondary institutions should:

- Remove barriers that impede student progress and success as students move within and across institutions.
- Dedicate space for ongoing discussions about holistic credit mobility and acceptance of prior learning credit.
- Consider creating blocks of credits within general subject areas similar to meta-majors that facilitate the process of changing majors and maintaining degree credits.
- Maximize the awarding of degree credit over elective credit.
- Assure that credit for prior learning and prior learning assessments align with accreditation standards.
- Help students avoid repeated learning of the same content.
- Align the awarding of prior learning credit to degree pathways and learner goals.
- Update Credit for Prior Learning (CPL) policies and regularly standardize prior learning assessments.
- Regularly evaluate the types of prior learning assessments and credits for prior learning (for example, AP or IB credits, CLEP exams) that can be awarded college and degree credit.

5. CROSS-SECTOR and CROSS-INSTITUTION COLLABORATION

Cross-sector and cross-institution collaboration strengthens credit mobility and expands opportunities for students. Strong, trusting relationships between high schools, Tennessee Colleges of Applied Technology, community colleges, public and private universities, industry

partners, Veterans Affairs Departments, and other business and workplace partners are important for student success. Collaborative partnerships support seamless transitions for students and create pathways and programs for students to earn credentials or degrees that lead to meaningful careers and that meet regional workforce needs. Students with verified military experience and learning credits are incentivized to attend and complete college if they are awarded credit for prior learning. Similarly, industry credentials earned and skills gained in the workforce constitute learning that may count as college credit. Adults with workplace experience and skills are incentivized to attend and complete college when workplace credentials and skills can be awarded college credit, especially credit that counts towards a degree. Postsecondary institutions should:

- Coordinate with the Veterans Affairs Department to regularly evaluate the types of military experience and credits that are eligible for degree and college credit.
- Provide clear and consistent credit to veteran students.
- Communicate and coordinate with local businesses and industries to determine types of credit for workplace and industry credentials and skills.
- Recognize the value of including work-based learning, apprenticeships, internships, and other real-world experience in a student's college career and find ways to grant degree credit for these experiences.
- Coordinate with middle and high schools to design presentations that are collaborative in nature to show the value of postsecondary education to middle and high school students.
- Take a holistic approach to granting academic credit for transfer and prior learning credits by coordinating between departments and offices, such as academic departments, advising, admission, and financial aid.

6. FINANCES

Lack of credit mobility and credit loss can be costly for students by extending the time to completion or graduation. These additional costs may result in students not completing their degrees. Reducing credit loss helps students stay on track, minimizes financial burdens, and increases the likelihood of completing a credential or degree. Recognizing prior learning and ensuring efficient credit transfer are essential to making higher education more affordable and attainable for all students. Postsecondary institutions should:

- Provide clear and consistent information to students and, when applicable, to their families, about college costs and financial aid.
- Include discussions on college costs and financial aid in advising sessions.
- Advise students about financial aid timelines, the potential to run out of financial aid, and the requirement that courses must be in a student's major to receive financial aid.
- Minimize or reduce the financial aid loss that students encounter from changing majors.
- Inform students of residency requirements (if applicable) that may affect cost and time to completion early in the transfer process.

7. ASSISTANCE FOR STUDENTS

Students need help navigating the complex steps required for transferring and getting credit for prior learning, and students benefit when they receive clear, consistent support from both the sending and receiving institutions. Proactive assistance from various campus offices, such as admissions, financial aid, scholarships, academic departments, and advising reduces students' fears and anxiety, builds confidence, and increases successful transfers. Postsecondary institutions should:

- Provide coordinated, student-centered guidance that helps students access the information and resources they need.
- Periodically review internal processes and procedures to ensure that the student assistance is efficient, effective, and positively viewed by the students.
- Provide students with guidelines and/or FAQs on the process of seeking transfer credit and a directory of campus offices related to credit mobility.
- Provide staff with guidelines on best practices for helping students who are seeking prior learning credit, no matter what type.
- Minimize the run-around to different offices that students often encounter when seeking transfer credits or credit for prior learning.
- Prepare students transferring from a small institution to a large institution for the more complex systems that often require coordination between multiple offices.

8. DATA

Data on credit mobility is important for future decision making on policies, programs, and practices that support holistic credit mobility. Consistent data collection and analysis strengthens institutional decision-making and accountability and informs continuous improvement. Postsecondary institutions should:

- Explore ways that institutional research offices within the EDWorks consortium can work together and share data.
- Consistently collect, track and analyze data, such as:
 - The number and types of transfer students
 - Amounts and types of credits accepted and rejected
 - Completion and persistence rates
 - Excess credits at graduation (especially among transfer students)
 - Reverse transfers
 - Other credits for prior learning
- Track and share data about the majors and programs students are pursuing including the programs they start in, the programs they change to, and the programs they end up in.
- Report findings from data and use results to make decisions to improve credit mobility.

9. TECHNOLOGY

Modern technology is vital to efficient and student-centered credit mobility. Well-designed tools improve data access for students and institutions, boost efficiency and automation of transfer equivalency generation, enhance learner portability, streamline the transfer process, and sustain institutional collaboration. With effective technology, students can move easily within and across institutions and make better decisions about their transfer options. Postsecondary institutions should:

- Explore emerging technology tools around credit mobility.
- Recognize the benefit of technical resources that allow students to view and understand their credits at any time.
- Acknowledge the importance of human involvement in analyzing some transfer credits.
- Adopt new technology when feasible and when the new technology has the potential to improve credit mobility.
- Consult with all stakeholders when adopting new technology.
- Consider ways to leverage partnerships between institutions for resource sharing.