

TO: Montana Board of Regents

FROM: Roger Barber
Deputy Commissioner for Academic & Student Affairs

RE: The Report on General Education Transfer Pathways

DATE: May 29 – 30, 2008

The Montana Board of Regents has had a policy on transfer of general education coursework within the Montana University System since 1996. That policy, 301.10, was revised extensively in 2005, as part of the Regents' response to the Transfer of Credits performance audit conducted by the Legislative Audit Division.

In adopting the policy, the Board of Regents intended to assist transfer students by creating pathways or alternatives that could be used to satisfy the general education requirement in baccalaureate programs. If a transfer student has completed one of those pathways, that student will not be required to complete the general education program at his/her new campus. The previous coursework should be honored, based on the language in Policy 301.10.

The three pathways or alternatives set out for transfer students are as follows:

- completion of an Associate of Arts degree or an Associate of Science degree at another higher education institution in Montana
- completion of the lower division coursework in an approved general education program at another higher education institution in Montana
- completion of the Montana University System Transferable Core

If transfer students have not completed one of the above-described pathways, but they have taken some general education coursework at previous institutions, Policy 301.10 creates additional pathways:

- if the transfer students have fewer than 20 general education credits in their portfolio, those students must complete the approved general education program at their new campus
- if transfer students have 20 or more general education credits in their portfolio, those students can choose to complete either the approved general education program at their new campus **or** the Montana University System Transferable Core

To the best of my knowledge, the MUS has never collected data to determine which pathways work for transfer students. The **attached report** is a first, therefore, and the information is an interesting first look:

--fewer than 20% of transfer students in the Montana University System come to their new campus with a completed general education program under the pathways concept established by the Montana Board of Regents. For those 20 percent, however, the Policy obviously works.

--Associate of Arts and Associate of Science degrees, which are specifically designated as transferable degrees with an emphasis on general education, are not a popular degree option, at least with students in this cohort.

--students rarely use the Montana University System Transferable Core.

--transfer students, overwhelmingly, complete the approved general education program on their new campus. They do that either because they come to their new campus with fewer than 20 general education credits and have no alternative; or they do that because, when given a choice of two general education programs, they choose the unique general education program on their new campus.

From a System perspective, the information about the MUS Transferable Core may be the most troubling data point. Although there are several factors that might explain that statistic, I suggest the following to the Board:

1) until recently, the Montana University System Transferable Core was a lofty. . . and invisible. . . idea. Although it has been on the books for more than 10 years, many campuses had never determined how their own coursework fit within the MUS Core and its subject areas. Information about the Core, on the OCHE website, included links that took users to campus-specific general education programs rather than to information about the MUS Core itself. Those problems have been corrected, primarily because the Board of Regents reinvigorated the Core in 2005 with the creation of a permanent Montana University System General Education Council. The Council, with the assistance of OCHE staff, has undertaken several initiatives to strengthen the Core. Until more students know about the Core, and its details are understood by students, however, it may remain a lofty and invisible idea.

2) the MUS Transferable Core and some campus-specific general education programs are very similar. For most transfer students, therefore, the advantages of one program over another are nonexistent, and students choose the home-grown program that goes with their new territory. Where those two approaches to general education are different, like Montana State University-Billings, the MUS Core may provide an attractive alternative to transfer students.

I would invite my colleagues in the Montana University System to share their perspective on the MUS Transferable Core. I would also recommend that the Board continue to collect this information for a few more years in an effort to determine if these general education pathways work for transfer students. The intent of Policy 301.10 is admirable. Its implementation and success depend on the cooperation of the Montana University System campuses, which is happening. In the end, some of the pathways may be impractical, however.

Report on General Education Transfer Pathways Under Regents' Policy 301.10

	Transfer Students*	Number and percent with AA/AS Degrees		Number and percent with Gen Ed from another campus		Number and percent with MUS Core		# with ≥20 Gen Ed Credits who chose:		# with <20 Gen Ed Credits	Number and percent who complete campus Gen Ed program	
								MUS Core	Campus Gen Ed			
UM-Missoula	1,983	252	13%	68	3%	0	0%	0	741	922	1,663	84%
MT Tech	263	18	7%	17	6%	0	0%	0	164	64	228	87%
UM Western	347	31	9%	38	11%	0	0%	0	53	225	278	80%
MSU-Bozeman	1,749	155	9%	172	10%	0	0%	0	495	927	1,422	81%
MSU-Billings**	1,349	189	14%	23	2%	0	0%	143	316	678	994	74%
MSU-Northern	360	72	20%	26	7%	13	4%	0	84	165	249	69%
Total Number	6,051	717		344		13		143	1,853	2,981	4,834	
Percent		11.85%		5.69%		2.58%				79.89%		

* Based on cohort of students from Fall 2006 through Spring 2008 as reported by campuses.

** MSU-Billings reported 50 students who were working on another campus' general education program, primarily students interested in getting into MSU-Bozeman's nursing program in Billings. These students are NOT included in this table.

Percent of transfer students who chose the MUS Core

Percent of transfer students who chose the campus' general education program