

News Item from State APSCUF

January 22, 2010

Expansion of the Pennsylvania Transfer and Articulation System: Reasons to Reexamine the Law

APSCUF has several concerns with the expansion of Pennsylvania's statewide articulation policy. Act 50 lacks many of the fundamental tools necessary to ensure that students are able to successfully transfer from a two-year community college to a four-year State System university and receive a high quality education at both institutions. Under the provisions of Act 50, faculty members have limited involvement in establishing major course requirements and equivalencies approved by the Transfer and Articulation Oversight Committee (TAOC). The timeframe for instituting course equivalencies is too short, particularly for specialized fields of study. There are also no common provisions for faculty credentials to guarantee that students receive the same standard of education at all participating institutions. APSCUF believes that the General Assembly should correct these weaknesses by reopening the law and strengthening the language.

APSCUF's Primary Concerns and Policy Considerations

Transfer and Articulation Oversight Committee

Because the law calls for new course equivalencies to be developed for major courses of study, it is necessary for faculty to have greater involvement in TAOC. While Act 50 allows TAOC to form faculty committees and consult with faculty members on major requirements and course equivalencies, the final approval of major-specific credit alignments will be done by the committee, which is largely comprised of administrative officials. APSCUF supports changes to the legislation that will give faculty members a voice on TAOC by adding PASSHE and Community College faculty members to the committee.

Policy Recommendation:

* Allow for three additional faculty members from the State System and three faculty members from the Community Colleges to be placed on as voting members of the committee.

Goals and Outcomes:

- * Provides more faculty input into the transfer and articulation system;
- * Promotes better synergy of course requirements and equivalencies.

Major-specific Credit Transfers

Major-specific graduation requirements are unique to each PASSHE institution and individual academic program. Some PASSHE degree programs include specific prerequisites in the first two years of an academic major that do not comply with transferrable credits, causing students to take additional courses and limiting their ability to graduate in four years. Other academic programs are not offered at community colleges (examples include Fashion Merchandising/Communication Design) and students transferring in these programs do not have the necessary background to excel at their major without these foundation courses. In order to adequately assess the needs of specialized programs, it is necessary to extend the deadline for the implementation of these changes. December 31, 2011 is too soon to have strong articulation agreements in place for major courses of study.

APSCUF also encourages Pennsylvania's higher education institutions to develop individualized Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) that give baccalaureate-granting universities more supervision over lower division coursework that may be transferred into specialized major courses of study. By promoting the responsibility of the upper division institution in specific fields, fewer transfer students will have to retake courses or add freshman and sophomore prerequisites. Specialized MOUs will help transfer students prepare for upper level major-specific courses and allow them to graduate on time.

Policy Recommendation:

- * Extend the December 31, 2011 deadline for implementation.

MOU Recommendation:

- * Give the institution awarding the baccalaureate degree greater responsibility with regard to courses taken in the lower division.

Goals and Outcomes:

- * Gives sufficient time for the implementation of an expanded program.
- * Promotes better integration of upper and lower division major coursework;
- * Provides assurance that transfer students are adequately prepared for major courses of study.

PASSHE Institutional Quality Being Preserved

Under Act 188 of 1982, "[The State System of Higher Education's] purpose shall be to provide high quality education at the lowest possible cost to the students" (Purposes and General Powers). It is imperative to preserve this standard of quality and put requisites in place for community colleges to adhere to similar academic principles, such as performance based funding and faculty qualification requirements. For example, Florida's community college faculty teaching courses designed for transfer must have comparable credentials to those required by the receiving organization's accrediting association, including a "doctorate or master's degree in the teaching discipline or master's degree with a concentration in the teaching discipline" (Florida Statewide Articulation Manual). In California, there are minimum qualifications for faculty to be considered eligible to teach a particular discipline. Faculty credential goals may be more readily achieved by establishing them in individual MOUs, instead of legislative policy.

Policy Recommendation:

- * Create a performance funding system for Pennsylvania's community colleges that measures quality and allows community colleges to compete for state funding.

MOU Recommendation:

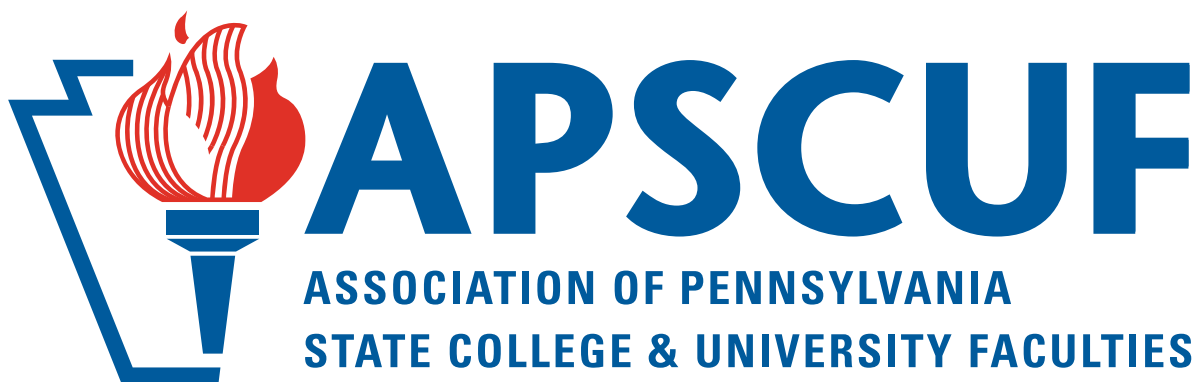
* Ensure credits accepted by a receiving institution are generated in courses for which the faculty possess credentials that are comparable to those required by the accrediting association of the receiving institution.

Goals and Outcomes:

- * Helps community colleges attract highly qualified faculty members;
- * Provides sufficient background for community college faculty who are likely to take a greater role in advising students on general education credits, prerequisites and introductory major course work in preparation for transfer to a PASSHE school.

APSCUF believes that a successful statewide transfer system is achievable if the General Assembly takes the opportunity to reevaluate Act 50 and strengthen Pennsylvania's transfer and articulation policy. By offering performance funding for community colleges, increasing faculty involvement in TAOC and setting a more realistic timeframe for implementation, the legislature can establish a comprehensive articulation system that meets PASSHE's academic standard of providing a high quality education at the lowest cost possible.

Unfortunately, the legislature is unlikely to revisit Act 50 without the support of PASSHE and Community College faculty. APSCUF encourages faculty members to not only get involved in the political process, but also to work with other interested groups to ensure the expansion of the statewide transfer and articulation system is facilitated properly and truly benefits the students of Pennsylvania's public colleges and universities.



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