

## Washington’s Ecosystem for Students Who Transfer

**A critical group of degree-seekers in our state are students who transfer.**

*Students who transfer* are a population of learners who transfer credit from one institution to another.

Some examples include:

- Students who intend to earn an associate degree with plans to advance their degree or career opportunities by continuing on to the baccalaureate level.
- Students who transfer credits to a new institution without having previously completed a degree.

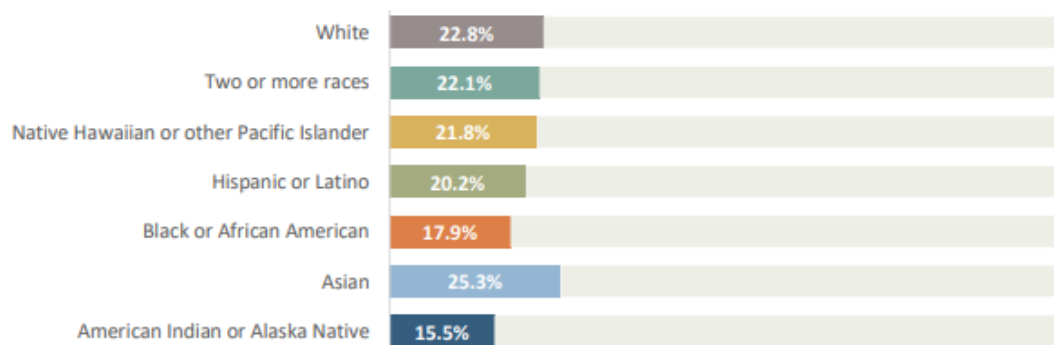
**There is room for improvement in transfer rates.**

Transfer degrees were designed to create clear pathways for students who transfer, and they offer one way of measuring success in transfer. During the 2016-17 academic year, approximately 45 percent of students who expressed intent to transfer and completed a transfer degree from one of the 34 community and technical colleges in Washington enrolled at a public four-year college or university within the state.<sup>1,2</sup> The majority of students (16,318) took other paths. These paths may include transferring to a not-for-profit college or university in the state, transferring to out-of-state institutions, or not continuing their studies.

**Not all student populations transfer at the same rates.**

When we examine students who transfer, we see disparities by race. Just 16 percent of American Indian students, 18 percent of Black students, and 20 percent of Hispanic students who expressed an intent to transfer were enrolled in four-year institutions two years later, compared to 23 percent of white students and 25 percent of Asian students (Figure 1). Additionally, students living on low incomes are 6 percent less likely to transfer than their non-low-income peers.<sup>3</sup>

**Figure 1. Percent of students at two-year institutions who expressed an intent to transfer who were enrolled in four-year institutions two years later.**



Source: WSAC analysis of Education Research and Data Center (ERDC) calculation of Washington public 2-year academic transfer student headcount in academic year 2016-2017 and Washington public 4-year institution transfer student enrollment in academic year 2018-2019, by race.

## What are Washington's challenges and strengths in transfer?

### **Washington's transfer system is complex.**

Washington offers multiple pathways to provide students with a range of opportunities to attain a bachelor's degree, such as the Direct Transfer Agreement (DTA) and Associate of Science - Transfer (AS-T). While these pathways are clearly defined with regard to institution-to-institution agreements, the system can be challenging to learn for advisors and difficult to translate to students, even when they follow the pathways. The significant number of institutions in Washington State provide a wide variety of transfer options for students but also have policies and practices that differ by program/area of study and institutional equivalencies.

### **Washington's approach to transfer is decentralized.**

Washington has multiple entities who work with institutions and sectors to respond to statewide transfer issues and recommend policy strategies for transfer of credit, including the Joint Transfer Council (JTC) and the Intercollegiate Relations Commission (ICRC). While these entities work together, Washington does not have a shared philosophy or rationale that guides long-term strategy to improve transfer systems and increase success statewide for students who transfer.

**Washington continues to innovate and build support for students who transfer.** Examples include:

- **Established transfer pathways:** Robust Direct Transfer Agreements, Major Related Pathways and Associates of Science - Transfer degrees set up students for success at the baccalaureate level. These pathways range from preparation in specific fields (e.g., STEM), to specific majors (e.g., nursing and computer science). Other pathways for students include technical or applied science degrees, Washington 45, and reverse transfer.
- **Increased student support:** Institutions have created student-centered resources designed to help students who transfer make a seamless transition from their previous institution(s). Some institutions have invested in a shared transfer advisor who creates the bridge between a community and technical college and a four-year institution with outreach, academic planning, and a connected learning community between prospective transfer students and current students at the four-year institution.
- **Increased transferable pathways:** Faculty in Washington are currently improving transfer through professional networks such as the Washington Council for Engineering and Related Technical Education (WCERTE) and the Washington Computer Science and Engineering Council (WACSE) by engaging in discipline-specific communities of practice.

## Opportunities to increase success for students who transfer

**Washington has the opportunity to improve the transfer ecosystem by:**

- **Increasing transparency for students, advisors, and faculty:** Opportunities exist to center students by creating tools to help students make informed decisions and better navigate the transfer processes.

- **Defining a statewide shared philosophy:** A shared philosophy across state-level entities can guide the long-term strategy and vision for the future of transfer in Washington.
- **Focusing on data:** Washington needs to better understand equity and attainment gaps in transfer, which requires additional evaluation of longitudinal data. Qualitative data on student experience with transfer would help shed light on disparities and areas for improvement.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup>“Intent to transfer” refers to students identified as “Academic transfer students” in the SBCTC data. These students declared the intent to earn an academic transfer degree, and completed that degree.

<sup>2</sup> This data set is limited to a comparison of students who completed a transfer degree from one of the 34 Community and Technical Colleges and enrolled in courses at a Washington four-year public institution compared to those who completed their degree and did not enroll in a Washington four-year public institution within 2 years. ERDC Report Demographics and Postsecondary Enrollment for Students with Academic Transfer Degrees. <https://erdc.wa.gov/file/800/download?token=1YwJ7V5c>.

<sup>3</sup> In this report, receipt of federal or state need-based aid is used as a proxy for low-income status due to data restrictions. WSAC Equity Landscape Report. <https://wsac.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2020-10-20-Report-Equity-Landscape.pdf>.