

## Issues in Credit Mobility

### What is Credit Mobility?

Credit mobility is the ability for students to earn postsecondary credits from multiple sources and successfully move those credits to earn a credential. A holistic approach to credit mobility focuses on learners, making sure that all validated learning counts toward a degree or credential.

Credit mobility is a concern for learning portability that includes, but is not limited to:

- College courses
- Dual credits
- Employer-offered training and programs
- Industry-recognized credentials and apprenticeship certifications
- Life experiences
- Military or corporate training
- Prior learning assessments and portfolios, including credit by exam such as AP, IB, CLEP, DANTES, and Cambridge

### Why does it matter?

Today's students earn college credit and other validated, postsecondary learning experiences from more sources than ever before.<sup>1</sup> Learners are increasingly mobile<sup>2</sup> and learn valuable college and credential-level skills both inside and outside of traditional postsecondary settings. Improving credit mobility helps learners **enroll**, particularly for adult learners, and helps all learners in Washington **complete** their education.

When credits are applied in ways that move students toward their credential, it can both motivate and accelerate student trajectories. Students save time and money, avoid repeating classes they've already mastered, and receive formal recognition for academic learning regardless of where they learned it. This approach helps institutions demonstrate quality assurance and builds greater trust between institutions and within their own. The whole system becomes more flexible, collaborative, and focused on what students actually know.

When credits transfer but don't help a student make progress – or don't transfer at all – students pay the price. As students and families question the value of a degree, a system that moves credits without benefitting students can increase mistrust and create doubt about higher education pathways.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://sr.ithaka.org/publications/holistic-credit-mobility/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-17-574.pdf>

## Challenges to Validating Learning and Transferring Credit

Validating learning and transferring credits across institutions or industries can be complicated for students, faculty, institutions, and employers. The process varies based on the type of credit or experience, including where the student learned the skill or content, and how the credit is recorded. Students often face unclear and inconsistent policies when moving credits. This can happen with all types of learning such as dual credits earned in high school, competency-based assessments, prior learning assessments, or portfolios, among other options.

- **Administrative Burdens and Cost to Students:** Students face many challenges when they earn credit from multiple sources, such as having multiple transcripts, or when submitting documents, such as course syllabi, if their past courses or learning have not yet been validated at their new institution. These processes require significant effort and understanding to complete the process. In some cases, students may have to pay out-of-pocket costs that financial aid doesn't cover.
- **Faculty Time and Expertise:** Evaluating prior learning and assigning credit equivalencies requires specialized knowledge and faculty time. Faculty need to be familiar with and trained in the institution's processes.
- **Individual Applications of Credit Applicability:** Students often find it hard to know if their credits will transfer or if they will help them make progress toward their credential. Some colleges provide information on how credits will transfer before enrollment, but most only review credits after students enroll and declare a specific program of study.
- **Tension Between Standardization and Institutional Autonomy:** Different colleges handle credit transfer in their own ways. This reflects an ongoing challenge of balancing competing needs: the benefits of standardization for students while upholding the need for institutions and faculty to maintain their own academic standards.

## Discussion Questions

- How can Washington build a unified vision for credit mobility that centers on students?
- How might a unified vision guide the development of systems for dual credit, transfer, and academic credit for prior learning?

*"The formal recognition of the many forms and locations in which postsecondary learning takes place honors those students' experiences and brings them closer to completing their desired postsecondary credential."<sup>1</sup>*

*– ITHAKA S+R, a national leader that has created a holistic credit mobility framework*

### Appendix 1: Common Methods of Validating Learning or Transferring Credits

Method	Process	Examples	State Policy
Direct course-to-course equivalency	<p>The process an institution uses to evaluate how prior coursework earned at another institution meets the requirements of specific courses at the receiving institution. This also includes credits earned in high school and exam scores.</p> <p>Course equivalencies may be established on a case-by-case basis.</p>	<p>Earning a score of 3, 4, or 5 on an AP Psychology exam will be awarded 5 credits, meeting the requirements of PSYC&amp;100 at all CTCs.</p> <p>A student who has taken English 102 “Composition II: Reasoning and Research at CWU” will receive credits upon transferring to EWU for ENGL 201 “College Composition, Analysis, Research and Documentation.”</p>	<p>SBCTC uses reciprocity agreements, meaning that courses earned at one CTC must have an equivalency at a peer CTC.</p> <p>Public and private baccalaureate institutions determine equivalencies.</p>
Academic Credit for Prior Learning (ACPL)	<p>The process an institution uses to award credits for academic learning earned through work, life, military, training, and formal and informal education.</p> <p>This may include standardized tests like CLEP and DANTEs, course challenge examinations, non-credit coursework earned at colleges or other training sites, portfolio assessments, and crosswalks between work-based learning and college courses.</p>	<p>A student submits a portfolio of experiential learning to a college. The college assesses how this prior learning aligns with outcomes of a specific course or courses and awards credit to the student.</p> <p>A student takes and passes a CLEP exam, proving they have the knowledge to meet course outcomes. This allows the student to waive the course or receive credit for it (the specific application depends on the institution).</p>	<p>All institutions in Washington are required to have policies that guide how ACPL is awarded, including specific provisions for awarding academic credit for military training.</p>
Articulation Agreements	<p>The process an institution uses to formalize accepting credits or specific credentials from external institutions or organizations.</p> <p>This includes Washington’s transfer associate degrees, as well as independently driven articulation agreements.</p>	<p>Upon completion of a Washington State transfer associate’s degree, students meet the requirements of lower division coursework at participating destination institutions.</p> <p>Seattle Colleges <a href="#">publicizes transfer agreements</a> with in-state and out-of-state institutions.</p>	<p>Washington’s transfer associate degrees are regulated by state entities, granted from CTCs, and include all public four-years and independent not-for-profits in the state.</p> <p>Institutions have autonomy to enter into additional agreements with employers, workforce, out-of-state institutions and more.</p>

## Appendix 2: Selected Credit Mobility Projects in Washington

Topic Area	Credit Mobility Issue	Project Name	Participants
Dual Credit	Building aligned pathways and competency maps for CTE dual credits in four regions of the state to build coordinated systems through shared data across sectors.	The Big Blur	Jobs for the Future (JFF), OSPI, SBCTC,
	Creating transparency in course equivalencies for students who have completed credits through Running Start or College in the High School (CiHS).	Washington 45: A list of first-year transfer courses for general education credit.  CiHS Equivalencies for the Public Baccalaureate sector.	All public colleges and universities. SBCTC publishes the “Washington 45” list.  CWU, The Evergreen State College, EWU, UW, WSU, and WWU. Council of Presidents publishes a guide.
Academic Credit for Prior Learning	Expanding state paraeducator conditional scholarship cost of attendance to include ACPL fees and promoting alignment on awarding ACPL within participating institutions for paraeducator certificates awarded by PESB.	Para-Educator Pilot	CWU, Educational Service Districts (ESDs), EWU, Highline College, Pierce College District, Professional Educator Standards Board (PESB), Seattle Central College St. Martins University, and UW.
	Standardizing and guaranteeing consistent credit awards for adult learners who completed coursework at Evergreen Goodwill or for learners who have received credits in other countries, to count certificate and degree programs at Everett Community College.	ELEVATE Regional Partnership	Everett Community College, Evergreen Goodwill, Keep Dreams Alive Foundation, Latino Educational Training Institute, and Volunteers of America Western Washington.
	Supporting institutional-level policy and practice development to increase ACPL awarding and reduce administrative barriers to access and application.	Constellation of Support	CWU, CPTC, Edmonds College, Everett CC, EWU, Pierce College District, Seattle College District, and Spokane Colleges District.
Transfer	Piloting a public-facing tool that shows students credit equivalencies and how the credits apply in their program of study.	Transfer Explorer Project	CWU, CBC, Clark College, Shoreline College, YVC
	National community practice to support regional partners in improving credit transfer pathways.	Holistic Credit Mobility Community of Practice	EWU
	Advancing STEM transfer for students from low-income backgrounds.	STEM Transfer Partnerships	9 teams, comprising 20 institutions across two- and four-year institutions.