



# **2021 Washington transfer associate degree effectiveness update**

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## Contents

Highlights .....	3
Background: Washington’s transfer degree pathway .....	4
Washington’s transfer degrees support a smooth transfer process .....	5
Which CTC students are enrolled in a transfer degree program?.....	5
Which CTC graduates earn transfer degrees?.....	6
Which transfer degree earners go on to a four-year institution? .....	7
Which transfer degree earners complete a bachelor’s degree?.....	7
Detailed findings on transfer degree effectiveness indicators .....	8
How many transfer degrees are awarded in Washington over time? .....	8
Bachelor’s degree earners from underserved communities are more likely to be transfer students ...	11
Are transfer degrees effective?.....	13
Are major-specific transfer degrees effective?.....	16
What is the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on transfer degree effectiveness?.....	21
Transfer updates .....	22
Updated transfer degrees.....	22
Other improvements in transfer efficiency.....	23
Guiding questions for future transfer degree analysis.....	23
Sources .....	26
Appendix A: Student Entry Definitions .....	28
Appendix B: Data sources .....	31

This report is an update to the Washington Student Achievement Council's (WSAC) 2019 Transfer Report.<sup>a</sup> WSAC submits a biennial progress report to the Washington state legislature that examines transfer associate degree effectiveness over time.<sup>b</sup> As recommended by the 2019 report, this update is the first step toward applying an equity lens to transfer degree data. Its primary focus is on outcomes for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) students.

### Highlights

#### **Washington's transfer degrees support some students, but not all, in their journey toward a bachelor's degree**

The number of transfer degrees awarded has generally grown over time, and they continue to make up a larger share of awards at Washington's community and technical colleges (CTCs).<sup>1</sup> This is good news since students who earn a transfer associate degree are more likely to transfer to a bachelor's degree program and more likely to earn a bachelor's degree.<sup>2</sup> However, transfer degree growth is not consistent across race and ethnicity. For many BIPOC communities, transfer award totals have dropped over time.<sup>3</sup> And, the share of CTC graduates who earn a transfer degree also differs across race and ethnicity. The proportions range from less than one in three American Indian/Alaska Native CTC graduates earning transfer degrees to more than half of Asian graduates doing so.<sup>4</sup>

Another positive outcome for transfer degree earners is that those who transfer to a Washington public four-year institution have a high likelihood of finishing a bachelor's degree.<sup>5</sup> However, this report's findings show that transfer degree earners who earn a public bachelor's degree sometimes earn more credits, potentially meaning more time in college, than students who enter public four-year institutions directly after high school. These outcomes affect transfer students inequitably, as the number of credits transfer students take differs depending on the type of transfer degree they earned, the type of major they completed, the student's race or ethnicity, their income level, and their age.

#### **Washington's transfer degree in business is a good example of an effective transfer degree**

The clear standout from this report and the 2019 transfer report is the transfer degree in business. This degree is the most popular major-specific transfer degree. It prepares its graduates for bachelor's degrees in business at all public four-year institutions and eight Independent Colleges of Washington (ICW) institutions. It is the only major-specific degree in the report where students with this degree consistently earn fewer credits toward an associated bachelor's degree than direct entry students, regardless of income. Further study into why students with this degree fare so well could help improve outcomes for students who earn other major-specific transfer degrees.

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<sup>a</sup> The 2019 Transfer Reports is at <https://wsac.wa.gov/reports-and-publications>.

<sup>b</sup> The term "transfer degree" will be used in this report instead of "transfer associate degree."

### **More equity-based, longitudinal analysis is needed to understand the full transfer landscape**

This report focuses on one subset of transfer students: transfer degree earners who earn a Washington bachelor's degree. It starts at the end of a transfer student's journey – bachelor's degree completion – and looks backwards to see how the student got there. It does not show what happens to the CTC students who did not transfer. It also does not show what happens to the CTC students who transferred but never completed a bachelor's degree. To more fully understand how Washington's transfer policies and practices are supporting or hindering students, especially BIPOC students, the state needs a public longitudinal transfer data set that includes disaggregated demographic information. It should use a cohort model to identify newly enrolled CTC students who intend to transfer to a four-year institution and then follow that cohort for eight (or more) years to show:

- Which students finish a transfer degree (or another CTC credential),
- Which students transfer to a four-year institution (including what kind), and
- Which students ultimately earn a bachelor's degree (including major).

It should also include information on race and ethnicity, gender, age, income, geographic location, Running Start participation, and other demographic information. Qualitative research with transfer students should also be performed to understand their transfer process experience.

### **The COVID-19 pandemic could negatively affect the transfer degree pipeline for Washington's BIPOC students for years to come**

It is yet to be seen how the COVID-19 pandemic and ensuing economic downturn will fully affect transfer degree enrollment and completion, as well as bachelor's degree enrollment and completion for Washington's CTC students. In Fall 2020, transfer degree enrollments fell compared to 2019, with steeper declines for students who identified as American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, or Hispanic.<sup>6</sup> These lower enrollments, coupled with a downward trend in CTC enrollments prior to the pandemic, could negatively affect the number of students who earn a transfer degree or go on to transfer to a four-year institution in the future.

### **There is more work to be done, and Washington's strong transfer partnerships can get us there**

Washington's longstanding partnership among sectors, institutions, and government agencies have made the state a national leader in effective transfer policies. Now it is time to rely on that solid foundation to focus on removing transfer inequities and mitigating the effect of the COVID-19 crisis on transfer.

### **Background: Washington's transfer degree pathway**

Washington's institutions have many strategies to support credential completion through transfer, such as reverse credit transfer and transfer advising programs. Although these strategies are integral to Washington's transfer policy landscape, this report focuses on the state's most prevalent strategy – the statewide transfer associate degree.

### Washington's transfer degrees support a smooth transfer process

In 1971, Washington developed its first statewide transfer degree, the Direct Transfer Agreement (DTA) associate degree, to create an alternate accessible pathway to a bachelor's degree. Students with a DTA from a CTC not only earn a credential, but they generally meet lower division general education bachelor's degree requirements. And, if accepted, they are admitted as juniors to four-year institutions that sign on to the agreement.<sup>c</sup> Over the ensuing years, state transfer partners developed major-specific transfer degrees to help students earn credits for certain bachelor's degree majors. As of 2021, community and technical college students have 12 transfer degrees to choose from, and 11 of those degrees are major-specific in programs such as Business or Computer Science. See [wsac.wa.gov/transfers](https://wsac.wa.gov/transfers) for a list of current transfer degrees. This report analyzes the effectiveness of some of these degrees. To provide context, it first examines which students engage in the transfer degree pathway with a focus on race and ethnicity.

Even though Washington does not currently track cohorts of transfer degree students from the time they start at a CTC to the time they earn their bachelor's degree, there are still some measurable stops on the transfer degree pathway. They include data about the following students:

- CTC students who are enrolled in a transfer degree program
- CTC students who earn transfer degrees
- Transfer degree earners who transfer to a four-year institution
- Transfer degree earners who earn a bachelor's degree

### Which CTC students are enrolled in a transfer degree program?

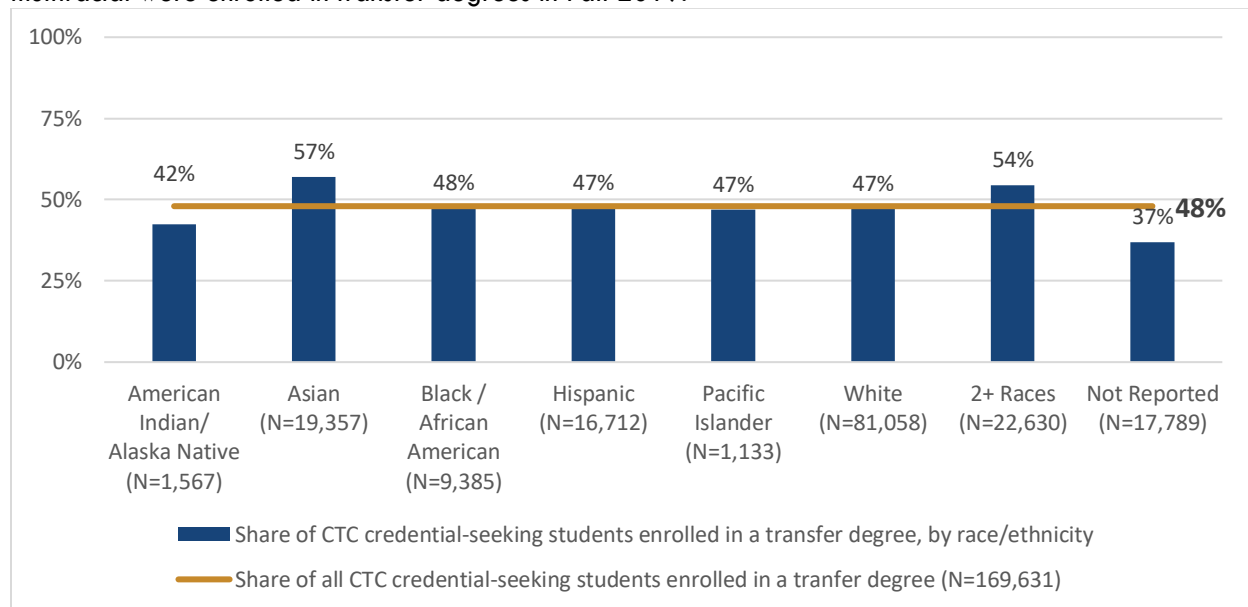
In Fall 2019, almost half of CTC postsecondary credential-seeking students were enrolled in a transfer degree program.<sup>d</sup> The share stays about the same when analyzed by race and ethnicity, except for American Indian/Alaska Native students, who were a little over 40 percent and Asian and Multiracial students who were both over 50 percent. Figure 1 shows the proportion of postsecondary credential-seeking students who were enrolled in transfer degrees by race and ethnicity.

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<sup>c</sup> Revised Code of Washington (RCW) 28B.10.696 requires DTA earners to have junior standing and to meet lower division general education requirements if admitted to a public four-year institution. Private baccalaureate institutions that are signatories to the DTA generally follow the same guidelines.

<sup>d</sup> Postsecondary credential-seeking students include CTC students enrolled in transfer degrees and students enrolled in professional-technical certificates, apprenticeships, associate degrees, and bachelor's degrees. The group also includes high school students enrolled in these credentials through Running Start.

**Figure 1: More than half of postsecondary credential-seeking CTC students who identified as Asian or multiracial were enrolled in transfer degrees in Fall 2019.**

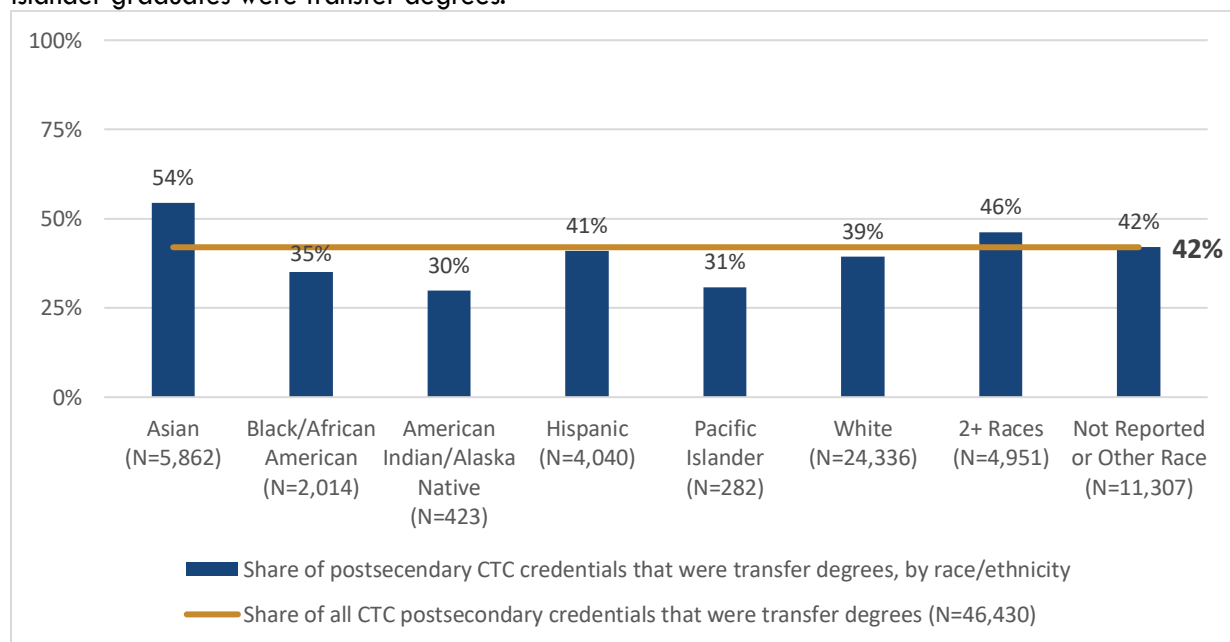


Source: SBCTC Enrollment Data Dashboard, accessed 2/12/21 at <https://www.sbctc.edu/colleges-staff/research/data-public/enrollment-data-dashboard.aspx>. Note: data source includes 222 duplicated headcounts.

## Which CTC graduates earn transfer degrees?

More than 40 percent of postsecondary credentials earned at a CTC in academic year 2019-20 were transfer degrees. Figure 2 shows that this proportion differs based on race and ethnicity.

**Figure 2: In 2019-20, more than half of the postsecondary awards earned by Asian CTC students were transfer degrees while less than one-third of awards earned by American Indian/Alaska Native or Pacific Islander graduates were transfer degrees.**



Source: SBCTC Credentials Awarded dashboard, accessed 12/21/20 at <https://www.sbctc.edu/colleges-staff/research/data-public/credentials-awarded-dashboard.aspx>.

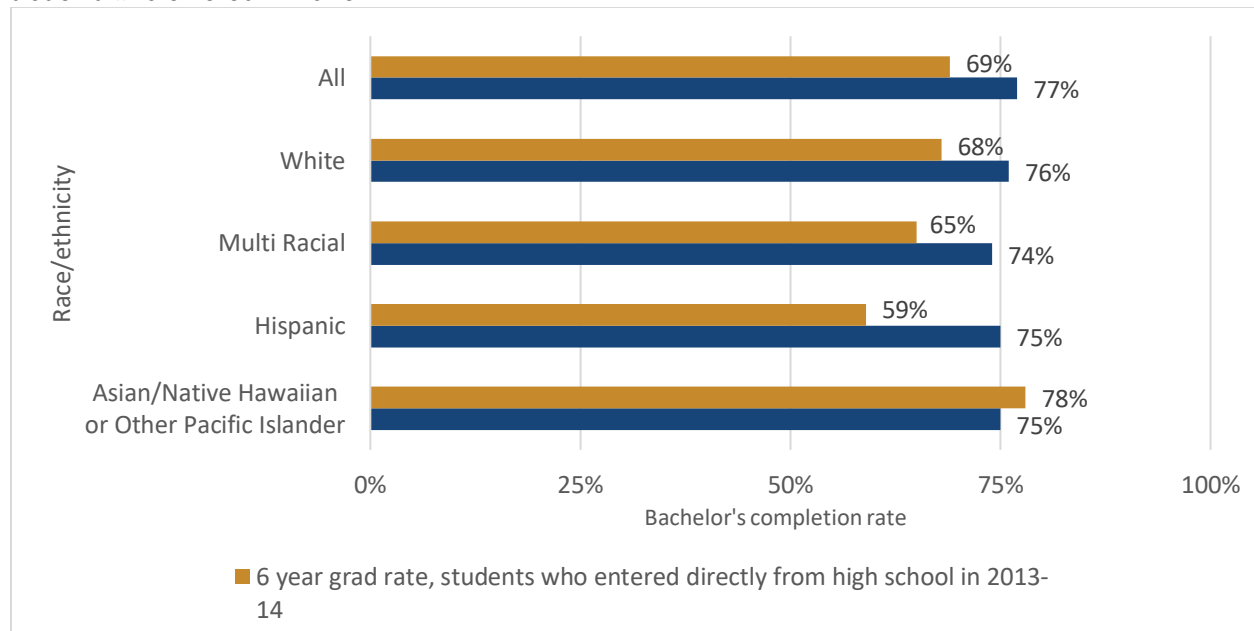
## Which transfer degree earners go on to a four-year institution?

Washington’s publicly available data does not track CTC students after they earn a transfer degree. The closest data point available shows that 69 percent of the CTC students who transferred to a public four-year institution or a CTC bachelor’s degree program in the 2016-17 academic year did so with a transfer degree.<sup>7</sup> It is unknown when the transfer degree was earned, and the data is not disaggregated by race or ethnicity.

## Which transfer degree earners complete a bachelor’s degree?

Arguably, the most important policy question about students who start their bachelor’s degree at a CTC is which of those students ultimately go on to earn a bachelor’s degree. Unfortunately, Washington does not publicly track transfer degree students in this way, but related data provide some context. For example, almost half of CTC students who earned any kind of associate degree (including transfer degrees and professional-technical degrees) in the 2010-11 academic year went on to earn a bachelor’s degree within six years. Washington’s rate is about six percentage points above the national average.<sup>8</sup> In addition, transfer degree earners who enter a Washington public four-year institution have high bachelor’s completion rates across race and ethnicity. More than three in four students with a transfer degree complete a bachelor’s degree within four years of entering a public four-year institution. Their completion rates are higher than students who enter the public four-year directly as shown in Figure 3.

**Figure 3: Most BIPOC students who transferred to Washington's public baccalaureate institutions in the 2015-16 academic year with a transfer degree had a higher bachelor's completion rate than direct entry students who entered in 2013-14.<sup>e</sup>**



Source: PCHEES Dashboard - Graduation/Continuation, accessed 12/21/20 at <https://data.wa.gov/Education/PCHEES-Dashboard-Graduation-Continuation/98ng-jhtx>. The source data did not include completion rates for Black/African American and Native American/Alaska Native students who had a transfer degree.

<sup>e</sup> Both groups were assumed to be juniors in 2015-16. Graduation rates were then observed four years later, which is six years after entry for direct from high school students and four years after entry for transfer students.

These data points only show subsets of transfer degree students. To best understand who is on the transfer degree pathway and what happens to them, Washington must track and publish longitudinal and disaggregated data for transfer degree students from their entry into the CTC to their graduation from a bachelor's degree program. In the meantime, this report update (combined with the 2019 report and future report updates) helps paint part of the transfer degree picture through examining specific transfer degree effectiveness indicators over time.

### Detailed findings on transfer degree effectiveness indicators

The first version of this report, written in 2005, introduced the following transfer effectiveness indicators:

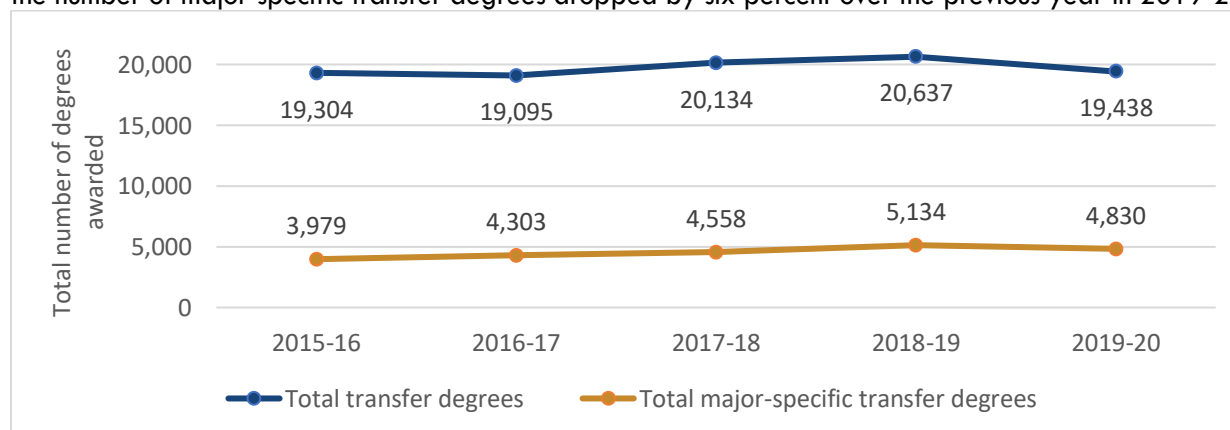
- The number of students earning transfer associate degrees over time
- The median credits earned toward a bachelor's degree by transfer degree earners versus students who enter a four-year institution directly

Data on race or ethnicity, income, and age are included where possible in the following findings. The findings include outcomes for transfer degree earners who earned bachelor's degrees from public four-year institutions and ICW institutions.<sup>f</sup> Discrepancies between this update and the 2019 report are due to using different datasets or because of data updates since 2019.<sup>g</sup>

### How many transfer degrees are awarded in Washington over time?

Since 2015-16, there was a general upward trend in transfer degrees awarded by the CTCs with a six percent drop in 2019-20 (compared to 2018-19). The same trend occurs in the number of awarded major-specific transfer degrees as shown in Figure 4. During that same time, transfer degrees composed an increasingly larger share (34 percent in 2015-16 and 42 percent in 2019-20) of all postsecondary credentials awarded by the CTCs, indicating that transfer degrees are gaining in popularity.<sup>9</sup>

**Figure 4: After a generally steady incline since 2015-16, both the total number of transfer degrees and the number of major-specific transfer degrees dropped by six percent over the previous year in 2019-20.**



Source: SBCTC Credentials Awarded dashboard, accessed 12/21/20 at <https://www.sbctc.edu/colleges-staff/research/data-public/credentials-awarded-dashboard.aspx>

<sup>f</sup> Washington's CTCs also offer bachelor's degrees, they were not included in the findings.

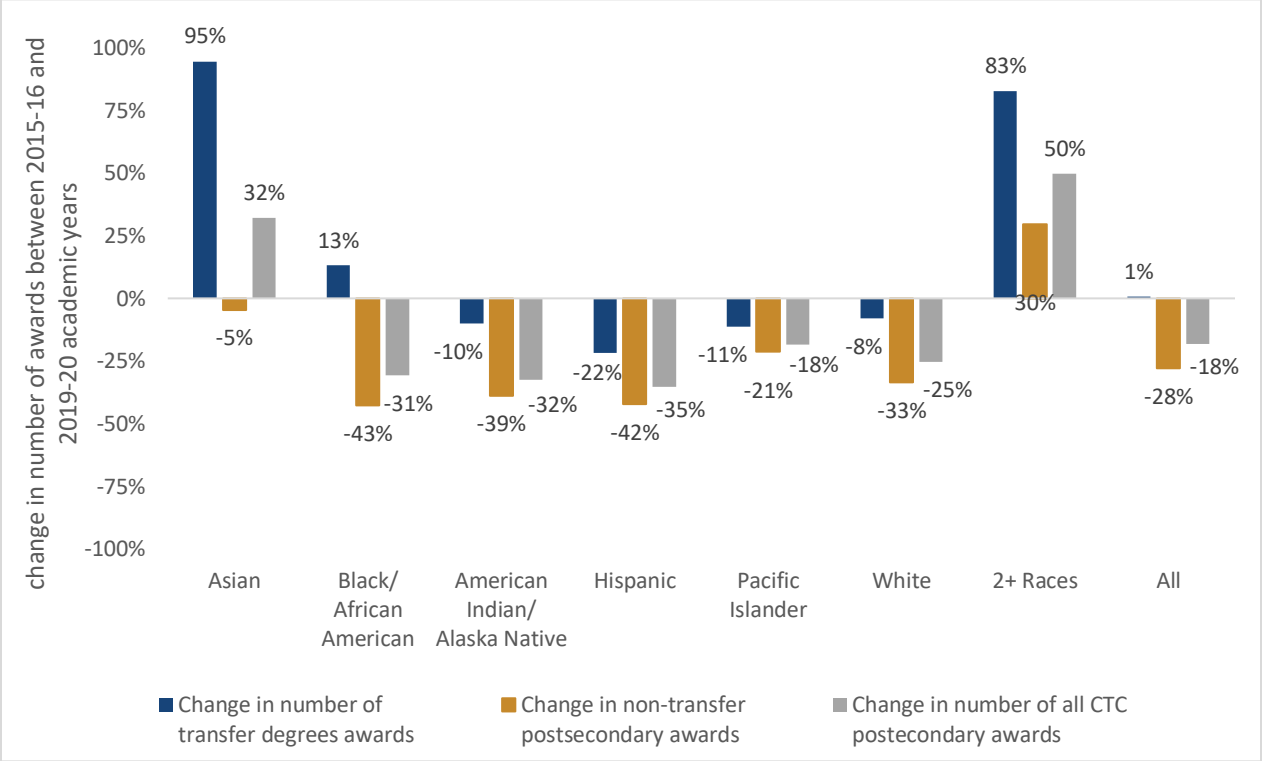
<sup>g</sup> See Appendix B for data source information.



Further study is needed to determine why there was a decrease in the number of transfer degrees awarded in 2019-20. One possible contributing factor is that transfer degree enrollments have consistently fallen since academic year 2011-12. Another potential reason is that the COVID-19 pandemic arrived right before the last term of the 2019-20 academic year. Unfortunately, as of the publication of this report, the pandemic is still affecting student enrollment and completion. The state will not know the total effect on 2020-21 credentials until Summer 2021, if not later.

Although 2019-20 saw a drop in transfer awards over the previous year, it was up one percent over 2015-16. And, the one-year decline was not as big as the 11 percent drop in all postsecondary awards or the 16 percent drop in non-transfer postsecondary credentials (including certificates, professional/technical associate degrees, and bachelor’s degrees). Unfortunately, the five-year increase in transfer awards was not reflected across race and ethnicity. Figure 5 compares the change in the number of transfer degrees awarded for the last five years to the change in all CTC postsecondary credentials and the change in non-transfer postsecondary credentials. It shows vast inequities across race and ethnicity, while also showing that the number of transfer awards has not been as negatively affected as other award types over time.

**Figure 5: Students who identified as Asian earned 95 percent more transfer degrees in 2019-20 than in 2015-16, while students who identified as Hispanic earned 22 percent fewer transfer degrees.**

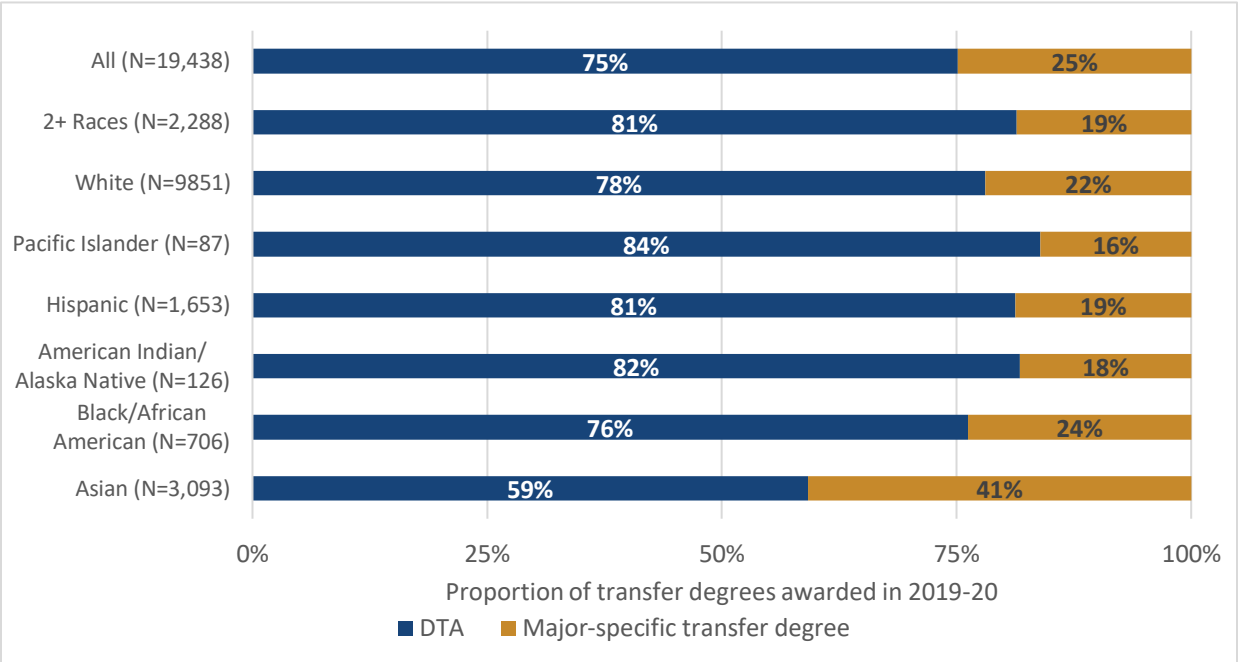


Source: SBCTC Credentials Awarded dashboard, accessed 2/16/21 at <https://www.sbctc.edu/colleges-staff/research/data-public/credentials-awarded-dashboard.aspx>

**Washington’s major-specific transfer degrees are gaining in popularity**

The share of transfer degrees that are major-specific continues to rise over time. In 2013-14, about one in five awarded transfer degrees were major-specific transfer degrees, while in 2019-20, that number increased to one in four.<sup>10</sup> Figure 6 shows that this breakdown differs by race and ethnicity.

Figure 6: In 2019-20 more than 40 percent of Asian transfer degree earners graduated with a major-specific transfer degree while 16 percent of Pacific Islander transfer degree earners did so.

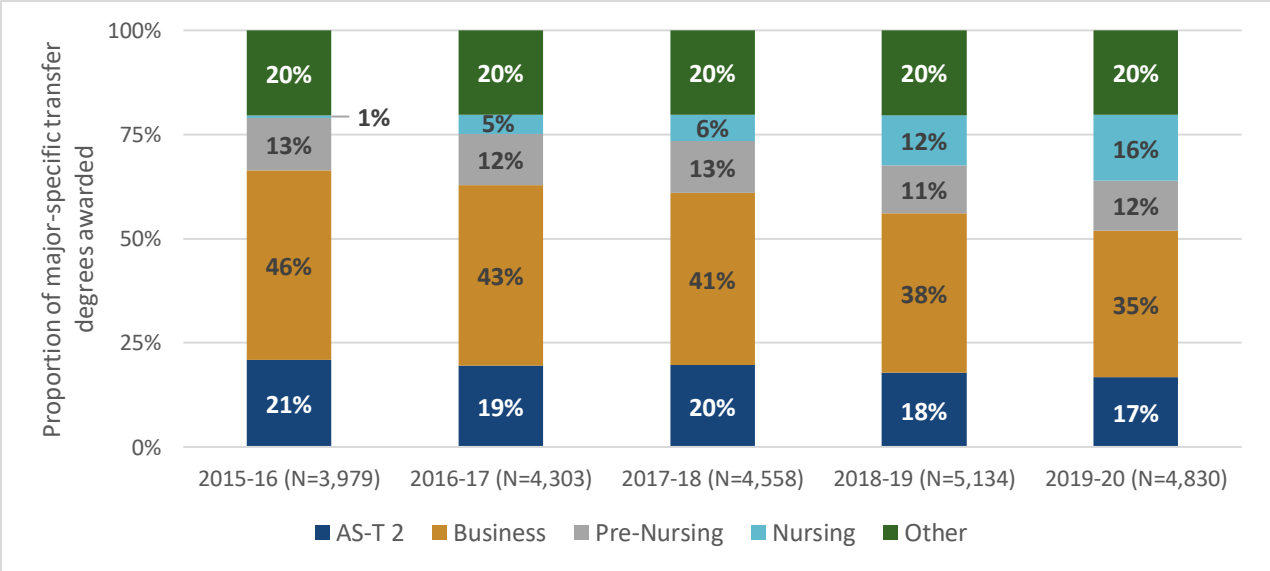


Source: SBCTC Credentials Awarded dashboard, accessed 12/21/20 at <https://www.sbctc.edu/colleges-staff/research/data-public/credentials-awarded-dashboard.aspx>

*Nursing is the fastest growing major-specific transfer degree*

Business was the most popular major-specific transfer degree, although it has composed a smaller share over time as other major-specific degrees, particularly Nursing, gained in popularity as shown in Figure 7.

Figure 7: The four most popular major-specific transfer degrees awarded in 2019-20 were Business, Pre-Nursing, Nursing, and the Associate of Science-Transfer Track 2 (AS-T 2). Nursing transfer degrees went up by 15 percentage points while Business degrees decreased by 11 percentage points since 2015-16.

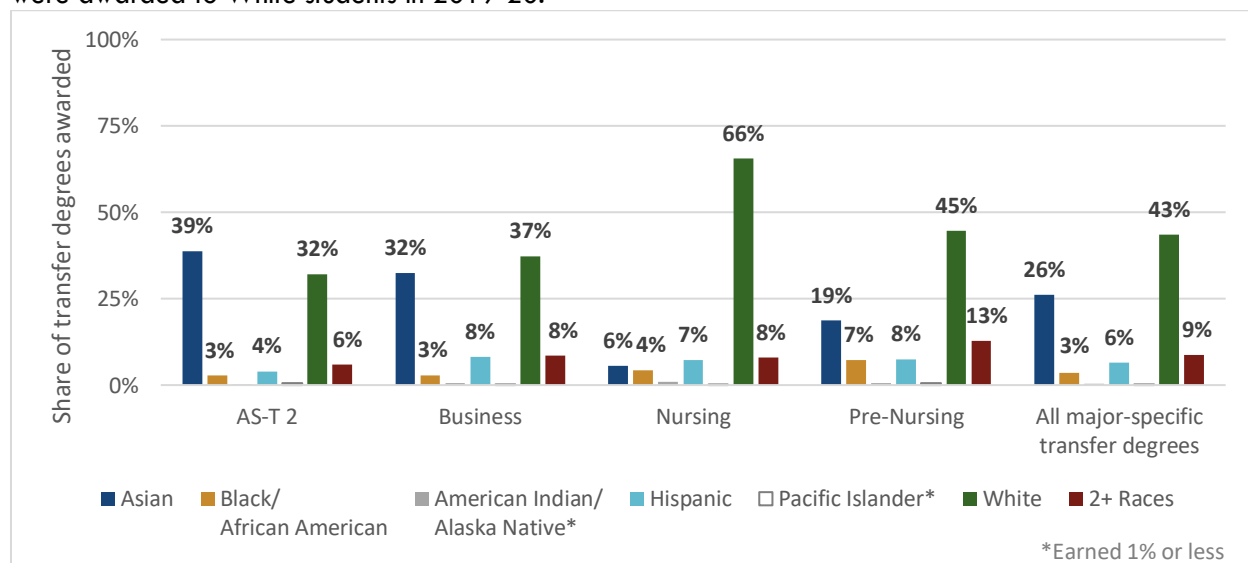


Source: SBCTC Credentials Awarded dashboard, accessed 12/21/20 at <https://www.sbctc.edu/colleges-staff/research/data-public/credentials-awarded-dashboard.aspx>

### *There are racial inequities in Nursing transfer degree awards*

Further analysis of the four most popular transfer degrees shows that award proportions differed by race and ethnicity. For example, a larger share of White students earned the fast-growing Nursing degree compared to other degrees. Students who earn this degree are eligible to test for a Registered Nursing (RN) license, making it the only transfer degree associated with a highly sought-after workforce credential. The degree also prepares students for a one-year Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) program at a four-year institution. Students who earn the other nursing transfer degree – the Pre-Nursing transfer degree – are not eligible to test for any state-required health certifications. Upon completion, they have taken the pre-requisites needed to transfer to a four-year institution to finish a BSN and ultimately take the test for an RN license. Unfortunately, students with the Pre-Nursing transfer degree are unlikely to transfer on to earn a BSN.<sup>11</sup> Yet, a larger share of Pre-Nursing transfer degrees were awarded to BIPOC students compared to Nursing transfer degrees as shown in Figure 8.

**Figure 8: Two-thirds of Nursing transfer degrees compared to 45 percent of Pre-Nursing transfer degrees were awarded to White students in 2019-20.**



Source: SBCTC Credentials Awarded dashboard, accessed 12/21/20 at <https://www.sbctc.edu/colleges-staff/research/data-public/credentials-awarded-dashboard.aspx>

The remainder of this analysis examines bachelor's degree earners with a transfer degree lens. It takes a backward look at Washington's bachelor's degree earners to see which graduates were transfer degree earners and compares their outcomes to other students.

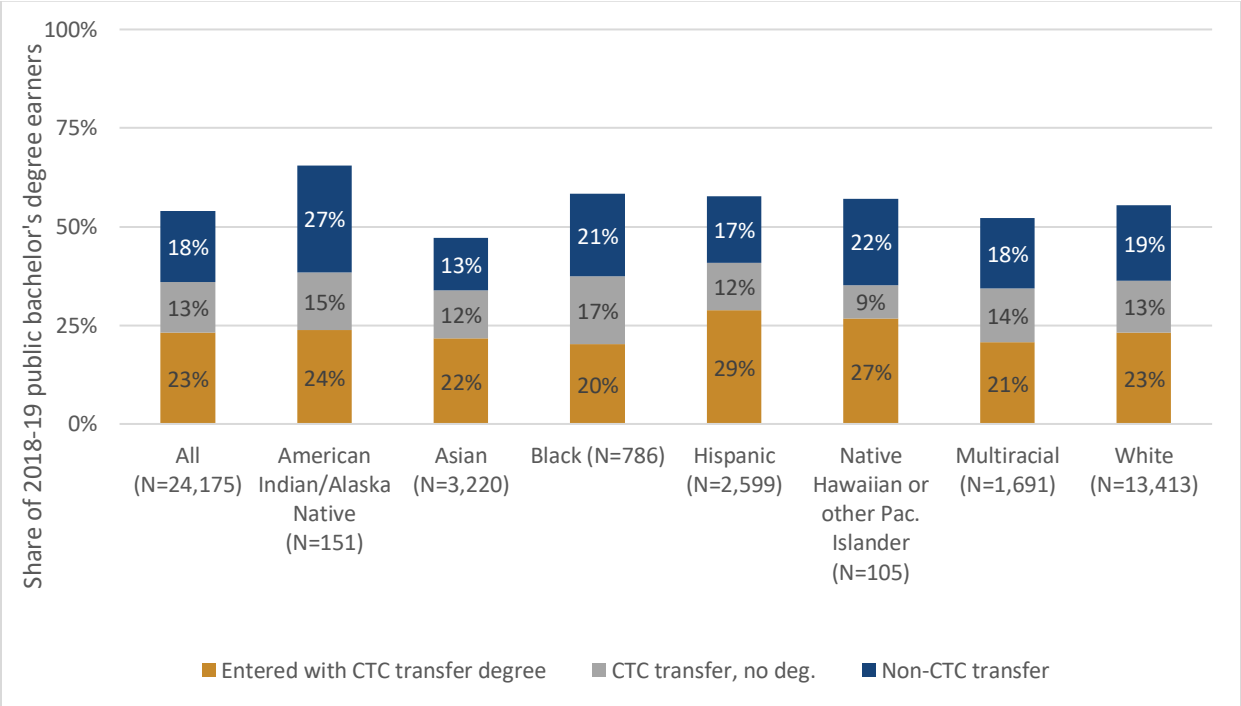
### **Bachelor's degree earners from underserved communities are more likely to be transfer students**

Before analyzing the number of credits that transfer students earn toward their bachelor's degree, it is useful to see who is earning bachelor's degrees in Washington and which of those students are transfer students (and what type of transfer students they are).<sup>h</sup> Figures 9 and 10 show the share of 2018-19 public bachelor's degree graduates who were transfer students by race, age, and Washington College

<sup>h</sup> See Appendix A for student entry type definitions.

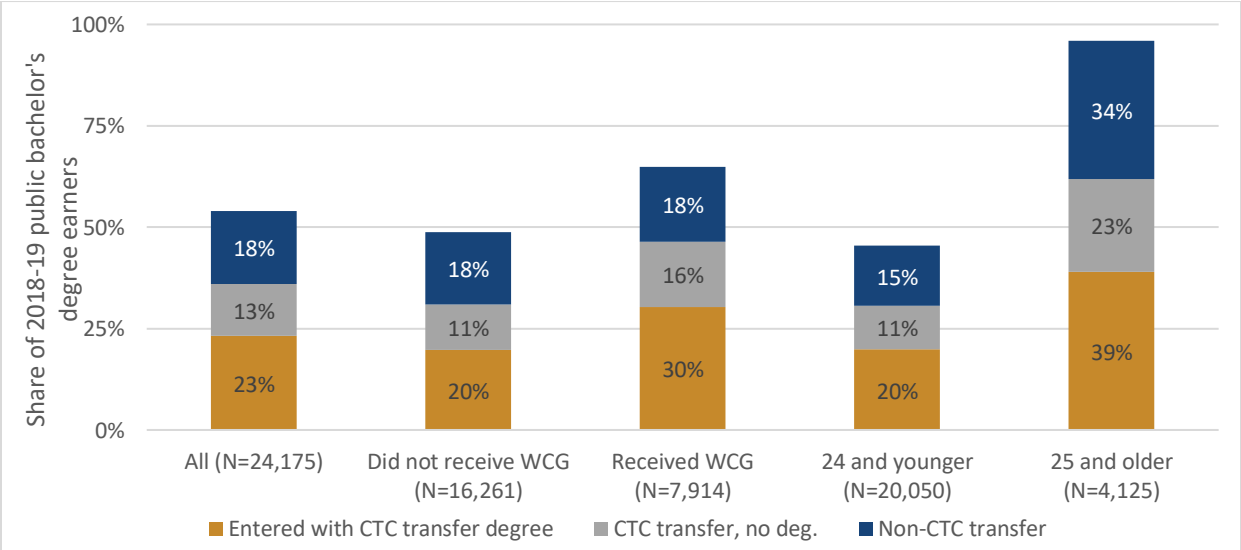
Grant (WCG) status. Figure 11 shows the race and ethnicity breakdown of 2019-20 ICW graduates who were transfer students. These figures show that BIPOC, low-income, and older graduates are more likely to be transfer students than other students. They also show that, in general, transfers who earned bachelor’s degrees were more likely to not have transfer degrees. They either transferred from a CTC without an associate degree or they transferred from a non-CTC.

**Figure 9: Two-thirds of American Indian/Alaska Native 2018-19 public bachelor’s degree earners were transfer students, while less than 50 percent of Asian graduates were transfer students.**



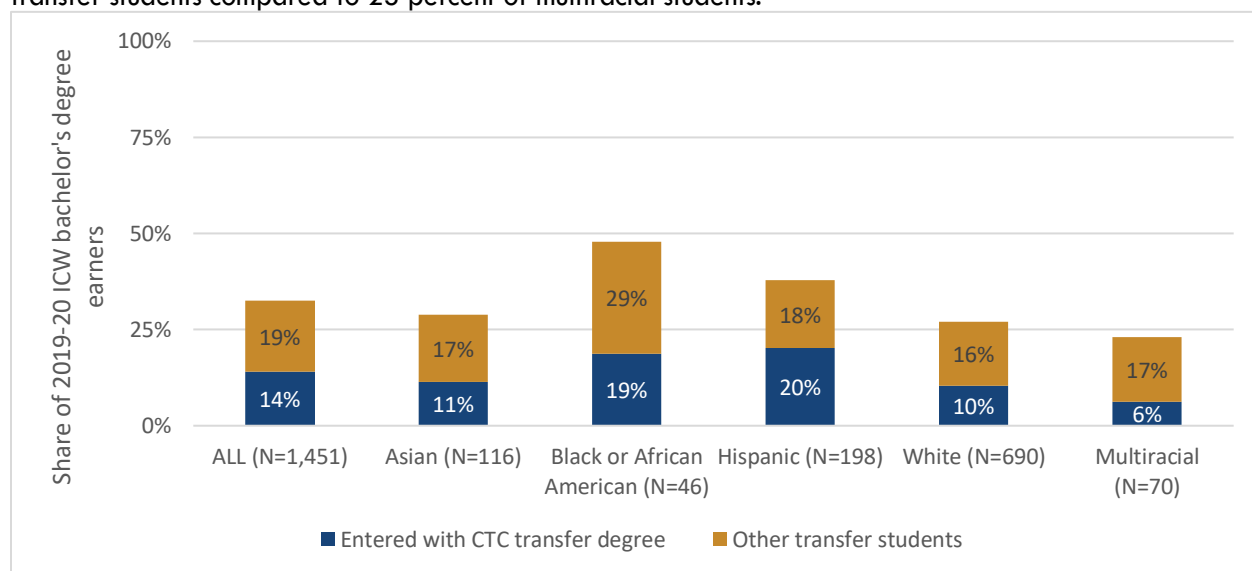
Source: WSAC staff analysis of public four-year bachelor’s degree completions for academic year 2018-19 from ERDC.

**Figure 10: 2018-19 public bachelor’s degree earners with the WCG were more likely to be transfer students, and graduates who entered at 25 or older were overwhelmingly transfer students.**



Source: WSAC staff analysis of public four-year bachelor’s degree completions for academic year 2018-19 from ERDC.

**Figure 11: In 2019-20, about half of Black or African American ICW bachelor's degree earners were transfer students compared to 23 percent of multiracial students.**



Source: WSAC staff analysis of ICW bachelor's degree completions for academic year 2019-20 from data received in December 2020 from seven of the eight ICW institutions that are DTA signatories. See Appendix B for participating institutions. Figure does not include populations with less than 25 transfer graduates to preserve anonymity.

## Are transfer degrees effective?

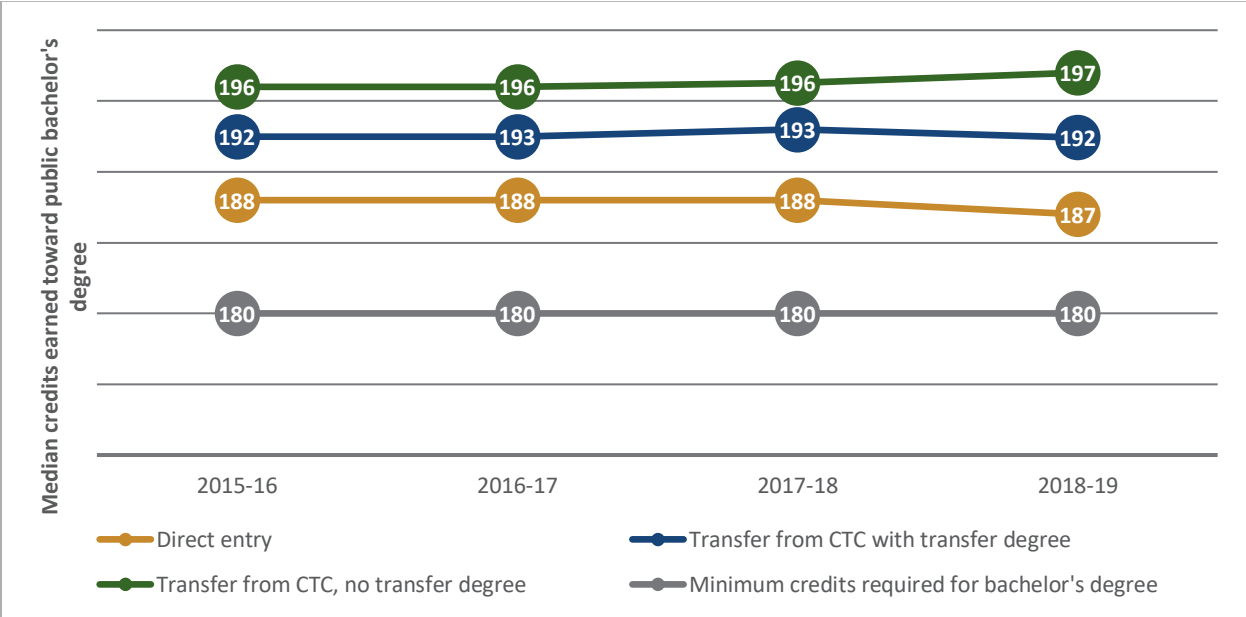
One way to determine transfer degree effectiveness is to look at the median number of credits a transfer degree earner takes to earn a bachelor's degree. This number should be equal or close to the median number of credits earned by a student who entered the four-year institution directly after high school. If transfer students are taking more credits than direct entry students, this could mean they are taking longer to complete their bachelor's degree. The higher the credit difference, the more this defeats the purpose of Washington's transfer degrees, which were created so students who start their bachelor's degree at a CTC have a similar pathway to completion as students who start at a four-year institution. This analysis also compares the number of credits earned by transfer students without a degree.

### *Transfer students with a transfer degree take fewer credits than other CTC transfer students*

Washington's public bachelor's degrees contain 180 quarter credits or 120 semester credits. This is equivalent to four academic years of full-time attendance.<sup>i</sup> Since the 2015-16 academic year, bachelor's degree graduates from public four-year institutions earned 191 median quarter credits, or about two courses more than required.<sup>12</sup> During that same time, bachelor's degree earners who entered the public four-year institutions directly from high school took fewer credits than their CTC transfer counterparts as shown in Figure 12. The difference in credits earned between direct entry and CTC transfer students equals about one to two courses, depending on the year and type of transfer student.

<sup>i</sup> Full-time attendance is equivalent to 15 quarter credits per quarter or 15 semester credits per semester. An academic year is typically three quarters or two semesters (not including summers, although many students are enrolled in the summer). A typical public baccalaureate course is worth three to five credits (except for The Evergreen State College's model, which offers programs that equate to a full term or year of credit). All credits in this report were converted to quarter credits.

Figure 12: From academic year 2015-16 through 2018-19, public four-year bachelor’s degree earners who transferred in consistently took more credits than students who entered directly after high school.

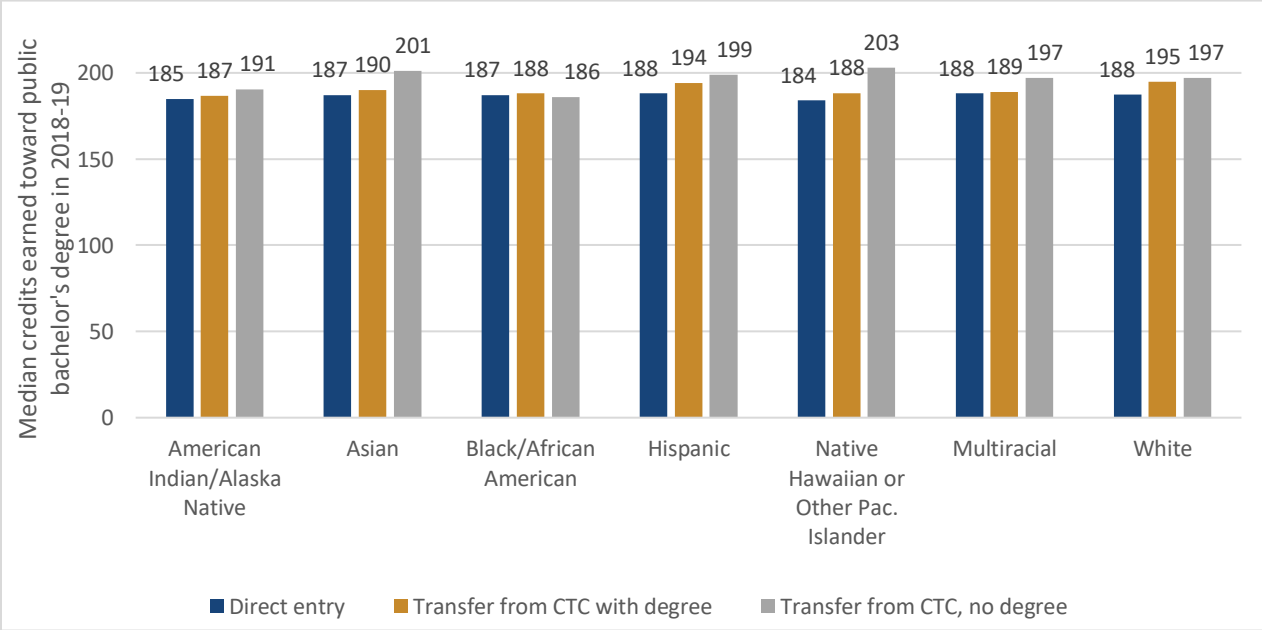


Source: WSAC staff analysis of public four-year bachelor’s degree completions for 2015-16 to 2018-19 from ERDC.

**Does race or ethnicity affect credits earned?**

This pattern was also generally repeated across race and ethnicity for the same time frame. A snapshot of 2018-19 public four-year bachelor’s degree earners by race and ethnicity shows that, for most subgroups, graduates who entered with a transfer degree took more credits than direct entry students but fewer credits than CTC transfer students without a degree as shown in Figure 13.

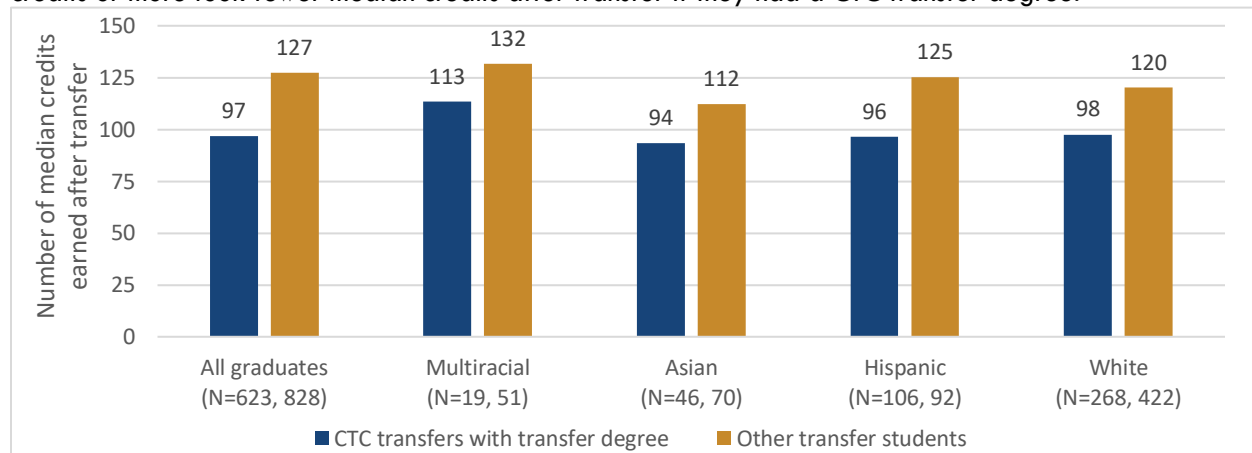
Figure 13: In 2018-19, Black and African American graduates saw virtually no difference in the number of median credits earned between transfer and direct entry students.



Source: WSAC staff analysis of public four-year bachelor’s degree completions for academic year 2018-19 from ERDC.

ICW's data also show that graduates with transfer degrees earn fewer credits than other transfer students—even when other transfer students transferred in about 90 or more credits (the equivalent of a transfer degree). Figure 14 shows the median number of credits taken at ICW institutions for transfer students who transferred in around 90 credits or more.<sup>j</sup>

**Figure 14: Regardless of race or ethnicity, 2019-20 ICW graduates who transferred in around 90 median credits or more took fewer median credits after transfer if they had a CTC transfer degree.**

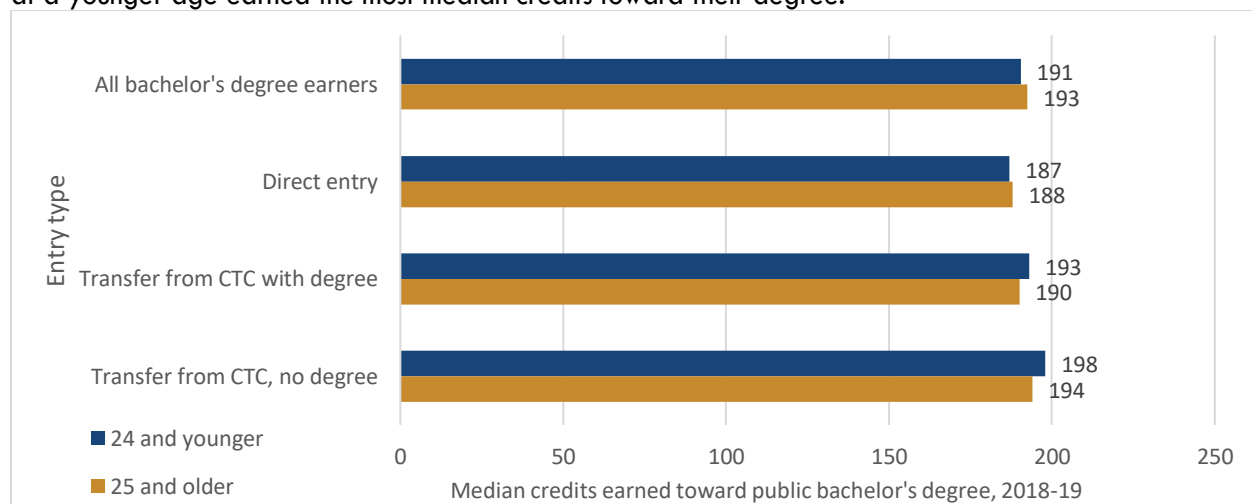


Source: WSAC staff analysis of ICW bachelor's degree completions for 2019-20 from data received in December 2020 from seven of the eight ICW institutions that are DTA signatories. See Appendix B for participating institutions and credit calculations. Figure does not include populations where the "other transfer students" category transferred in fewer than 88 median credits.

### *Does age affect credits earned?*

Two age groups were also studied at the public four-year institutions: students who entered at 25 and older and students who entered at 24 and younger. Figure 15 shows that younger transfer students who went on to graduate took slightly more median credits than older transfer students who graduated.

**Figure 15: In 2018-19, public four-year graduates who transferred from a CTC without a transfer degree at a younger age earned the most median credits toward their degree.**



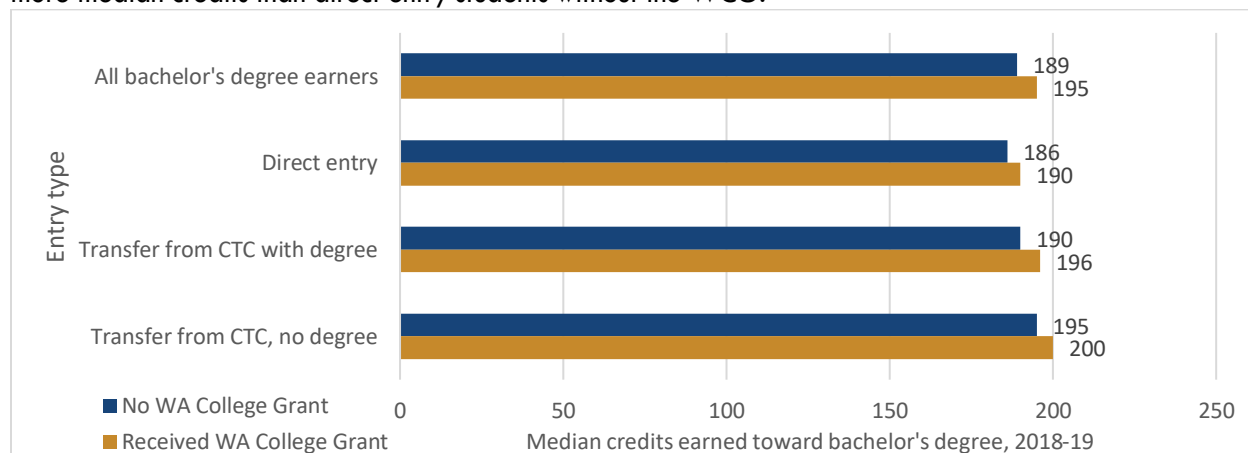
Source: WSAC staff analysis of public four-year bachelor's degree completions for academic year 2018-19 from ERDC.

<sup>j</sup> The number of credits required for a bachelor's degree at ICW institutions varies from 180 to 192 quarter credits.

### How many credits do WCG recipients take?

Finally, the report found that receiving the WCG aligned with earning more median credits at public four-year institutions. The WCG is used as a proxy for income in this report, since WCG recipients have a lower income than other students.<sup>k</sup> Figure 16 shows that bachelor's degree earners who received the WCG at any point of attendance at a public four-year institution took more credits than those who did not get the WCG. The difference in the credits earned within each entry type was equivalent to about one course.

**Figure 16: 2018-19 public bachelor's degree earners who transferred from a CTC without a transfer degree and who received the WCG earned five more median credits than those without the WCG and 14 more median credits than direct entry students without the WCG.**



Source: WSAC staff analysis of public four-year bachelor's degree completions for academic year 2018-19 from ERDC.

The number of credits a transfer degree earner takes toward their bachelor's degree also depends on what kind of transfer degree they earned and what they majored in, as shown in the following section.

### Are major-specific transfer degrees effective?

The intent of major-specific transfer degrees is to create a seamless two-year to four-year pathway for certain bachelor's degree majors. Students with a major-specific degree who transfer into a corresponding major at a four-year institution as juniors should have taken the same pre-requisites as their direct entry counterparts. And, when they graduate, they should earn about the same number of credits toward their chosen bachelor's degree.

This report analyzes the median quarter credits earned toward a public four-year bachelor's degree in major areas related to the following five transfer degrees:<sup>l</sup>

- **Associate of Science-Transfer Track 1 (AS-T 1)** – prepares students for bachelor's degrees in biological sciences, environmental/resource sciences, chemistry, geology, and earth science.
- **Associate of Science-Transfer Track 2 (AS-T 2)** – prepares students for bachelor's degrees in engineering, computer science, physics, and atmospheric sciences.

<sup>k</sup> Until July 2020, some students who qualified for WCG did not receive the grant due to limited funds. This means that some students who did not receive WCG in the report data may have also had a lower income.

<sup>l</sup> Although Nursing and Pre-Nursing are popular transfer degrees, they were not studied due to data limitations.



- **Associate of Biology Direct Transfer Agreement/Major Related Program (Biology DTA/MRP)** – prepares students for bachelor’s degrees in biology.
- **Associate in Business Transfer Agreement/Major Related Program (Business DTA/MRP)** – prepares students for bachelor’s degrees in business administration, including accounting, management, and management information systems.
- **Associate of Science-Transfer Track 2 Engineering Major Related Program (Engineering AS-T 2/MRP)** – offers three tracks that prepare students for degrees in: Bioengineering and chemical engineering; computer engineering and electrical engineering; and mechanical engineering, civil engineering, aeronautical engineering, industrial engineering, and materials science engineering.

For each major area, the credit outcomes were analyzed for four types of graduates, based on how they entered the public four-year institution:<sup>m</sup>

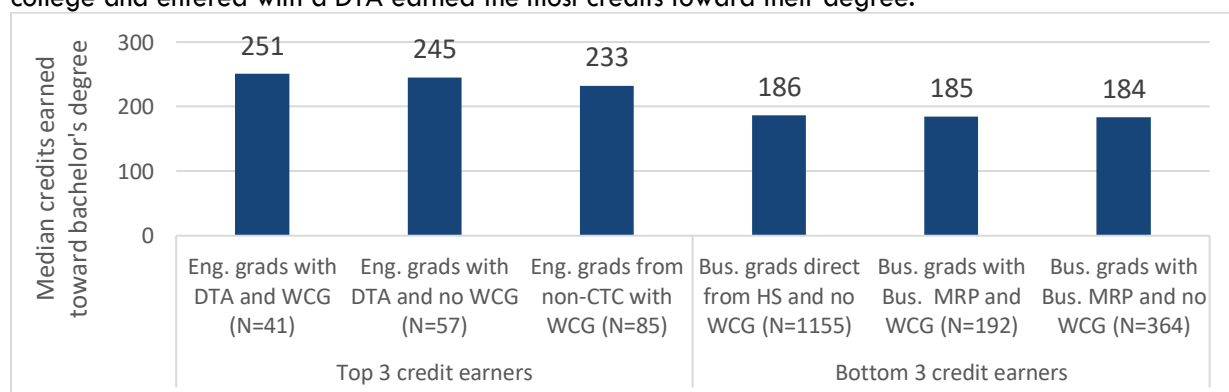
- Direct Entry
- Transfer with a general DTA
- Transfer with associated major-specific transfer degree
- Transfer from a CTC without a transfer degree
- Transfer from elsewhere (only used in Figure 17)

The report also disaggregates the data by who received the WCG and who did not as a proxy for income. Race and ethnicity were not studied due to small sample size and concern for identity disclosure.

### ***Engineering graduates took the most credits, while Business graduates took the least***

Before looking at each of the five major areas individually, the report studies which graduates earned the fewest credits and which earned the most when looking at a combination of major, entry type, and WCG use. Figure 17 shows that, out of the dataset studied, a graduate’s major, how they enter the institution, and whether they received need-based aid is correlated with the number of median credits earned.

**Figure 17: In 2018-19, public engineering bachelor’s degree earners who used the WCG to help pay for college and entered with a DTA earned the most credits toward their degree.**



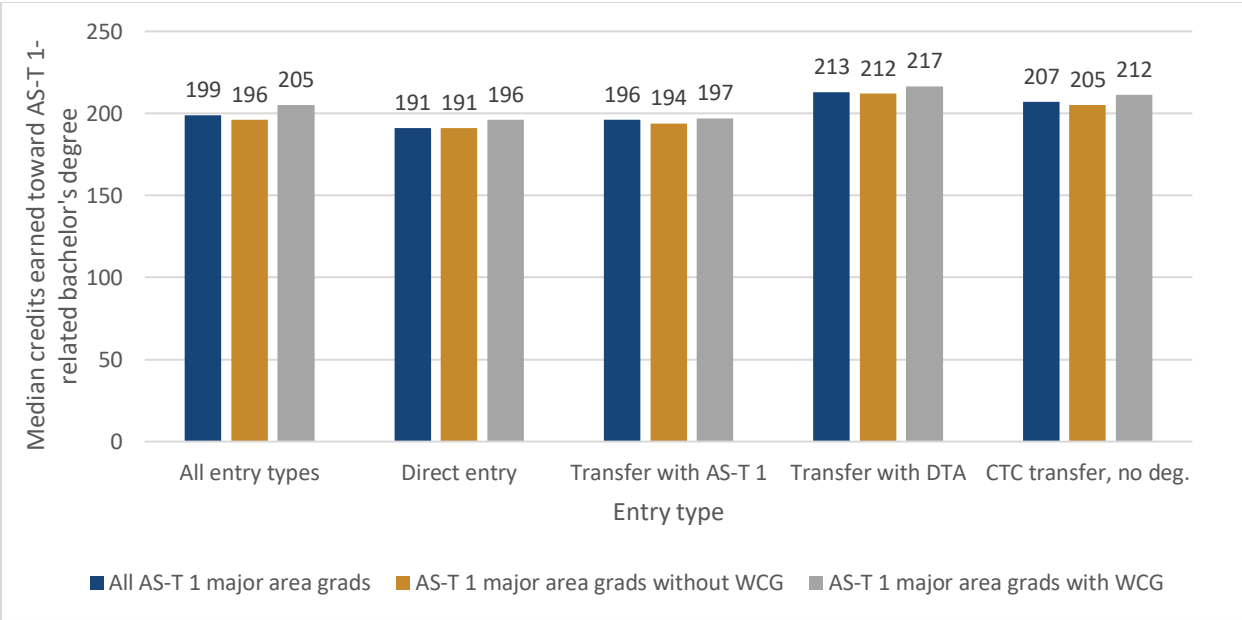
Source: WSAC staff analysis of public four-year bachelor’s degree completions for academic year 2018-19 from ERDC.

<sup>m</sup> See Appendix A for complete definitions.

*Transfer students with an AS-T 1 took slightly more median credits than direct entry students on the way to an AS-T 1-related bachelor’s degree*

From 2015-16 to 2018-19, students who earned a bachelor’s degree in an AS-T 1 major area earned about the same number of median credits toward their degree. When examined by entry type and WCG use, 2018-19 graduates either took about the same or slightly fewer credits than 2015-16 graduates in the same category. The one exception was for graduates who entered with an AS-T 1 and did not have the WCG. Those students earned five more credits over that same period. When looking more closely at 2018-19 graduates, students who earned a major in an AS-T 1 related area who also had the WCG took more credits toward their bachelor’s degree than other students. Transfer students with a DTA and the WCG took the most, while direct entry students without WCG took the least as shown in Figure 18.

**Figure 18: AS-T 1 major area graduates from 2018-19 public baccalaureates who entered with an AS-T 1 took slightly more median credits than students who entered directly from high school and fewer credits than other CTC transfer students.**

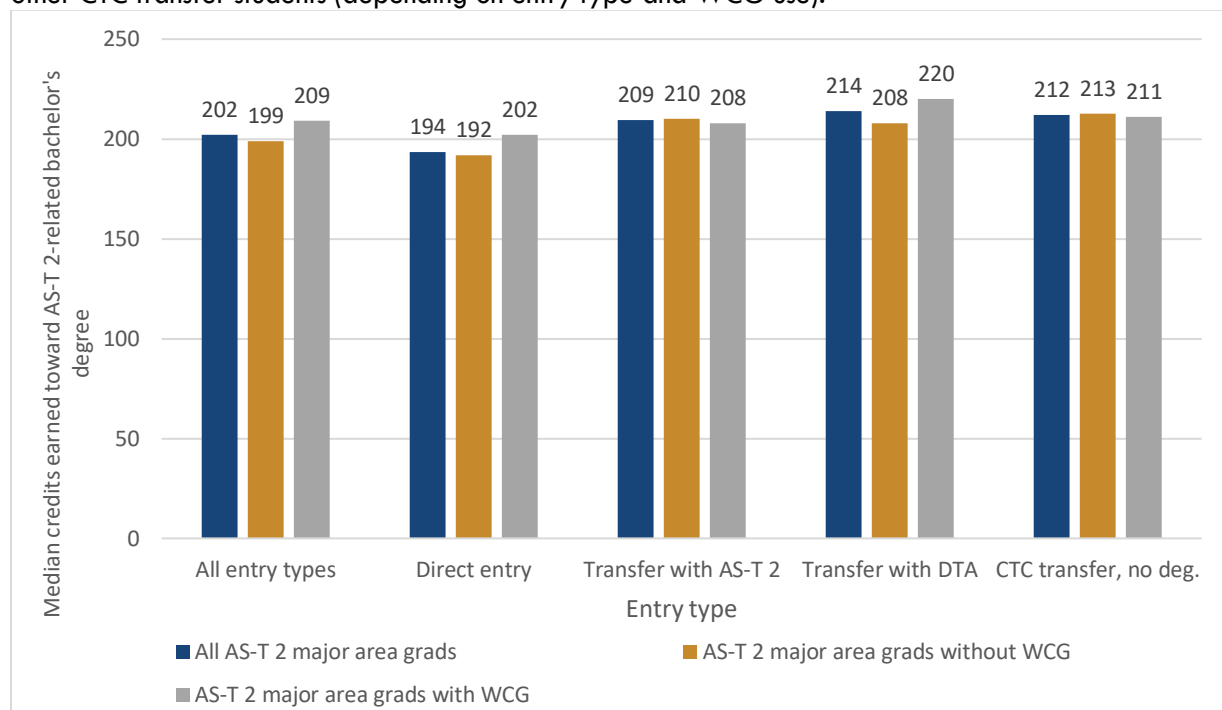


Source: WSAC staff analysis of public four-year bachelor’s degree completions for academic year 2018-19 from ERDC.

*Transfer students with an AS-T 2 who earned an AS-T 2-related bachelor’s degree took about 30 more median credits than required for a bachelor’s degree*

Between 2015-16 and 2018-19, public baccalaureate students who earned a degree in an AS-T 2-related major earned about the same number of median credits over time. But students who entered with an AS-T 2 saw an increase of eight median credits (201 in 2015-16 and 209 in 2018-19), which is equivalent to two courses. Further, AS-T 2 transfers without the WCG took 11 more median credits during that same time span. Figure 19 shows median credits earned toward an AS-T 2 degree by entry type and WCG use in 2018-19.

Figure 19: In 2018-19, students who transferred to a public four-year with an AS-T 2 and who earned an AS-T 2-related degree took more credits than direct entry students and about the same or fewer than other CTC transfer students (depending on entry type and WCG use).



Source: WSAC staff analysis of public four-year bachelor's degree completions for academic year 2018-19 from ERDC.

### *The effectiveness of the Biology DTA/MRP is difficult to measure over time*

While direct entry students who earned a biology bachelor's degree from a public baccalaureate institution steadily earned slightly fewer median credits between 2015-16 and 2018-19, the median credits earned by transfer students with a Biology DTA/MRP showed no consistent trend over time. For example, in 2018-19, transfer students with a Biology DTA/MRP took about the same number of median credits toward a biology degree as direct entry students, but in 2017-18, Biology DTA/MRP students took 9 more median credits (201 versus 192). And, 2017-18 Biology graduates who used the WCG had a difference of 14 median credits (210 for Biology DTA/MRP transfers and 196 for direct entry students).

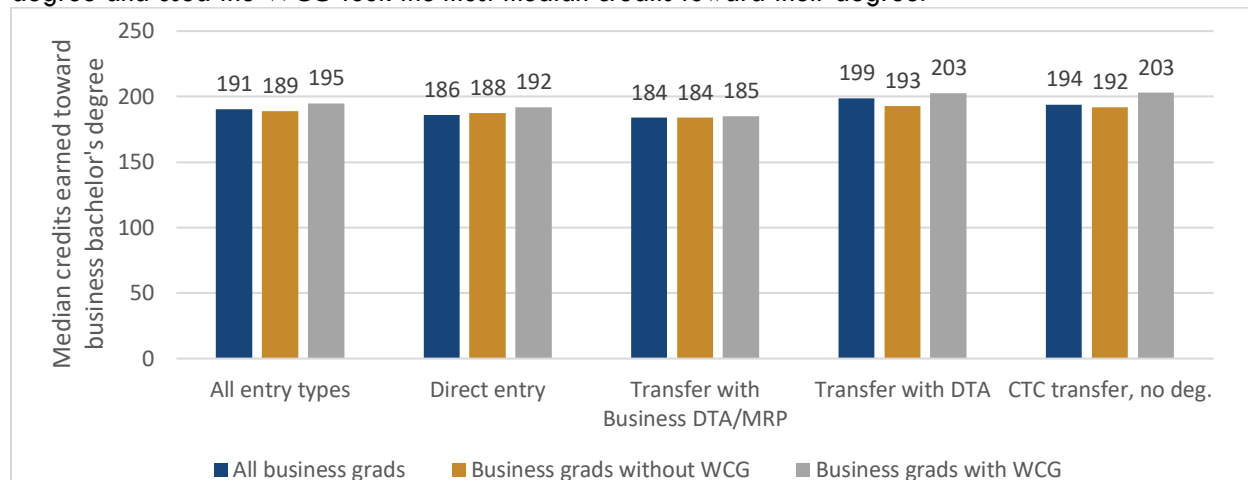
Because they both prepare students for biology bachelor's degrees, it is also important to study the the Biology DTA/MRP in comparison to the AS-T 1. It would be useful information to know which transfer degree leads to fewer earned credits so that biology students could be advised toward the appropriate transfer degree. When studying public four-year 2015-16 to 2018-19 data, Biology graduates with an AS-T 1 generally earned fewer credits toward their degree than Biology DTA/MRP graduates, but it is not a consistent difference over time, nor is it always the case in each year studied. These results indicate that more analysis is needed to determine the effectiveness of the Biology DTA/MRP.

### *The Business DTA/MRP is an effective tool for earning a business bachelor's degree.*

Both the 2019 report and this report show that business graduates from public four-year institutions who enter with a Business DTA/MRP took slightly fewer credits than direct entry students and only about five more median credits than the 180 required for a degree. This has remained the case from 2015-16

through 2018-19. And, it is true regardless of WCG use. Over time, transfers with a Business DTA/MRP who had the WCG took slightly more credits than those without the WCG but always less than direct entry students. They also took fewer credits than any other kind of transfer student. Figure 20 shows median credits earned by entry type and WCG status for all transfer student types in 2018-19.

**Figure 20: In 2018-19, public business graduates who transferred from a CTC with a DTA or no transfer degree and used the WCG took the most median credits toward their degree.**



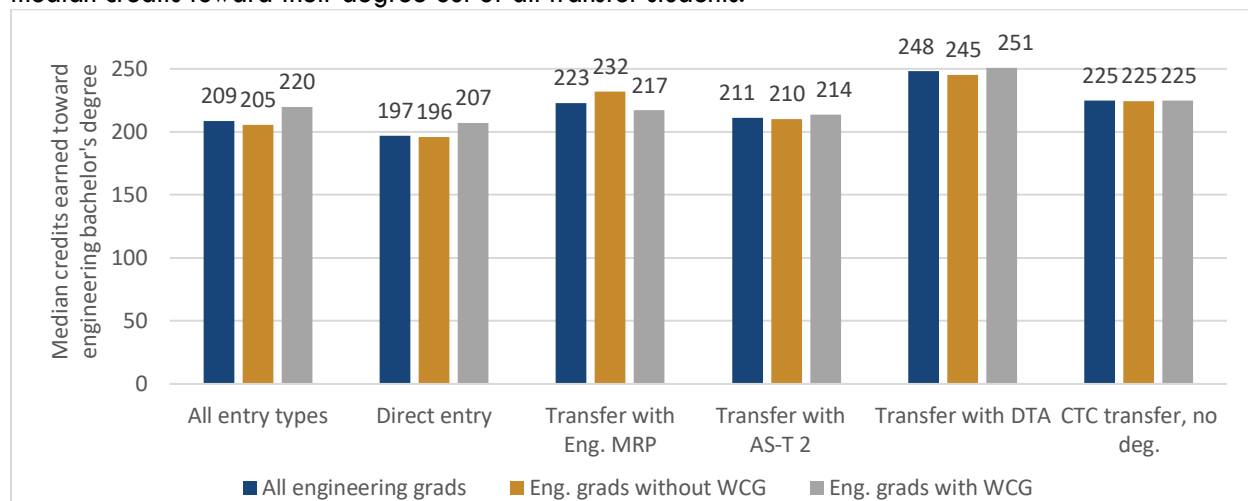
Source: WSAC staff analysis of public four-year bachelor's degree completions for academic year 2018-19 from ERDC.

### *Engineering graduates who enter as transfers earned fewer median credits with an AS-T 2 instead of the more specific Engineering AS-T 2/MRP*

This report and the 2019 report both show that engineering graduates took the most median credits toward their degree compared to the other majors studied. Both reports also show that transfer students with the Engineering AS-T 2/MRP take more median credits than direct entry students (up to 28 more, depending on the year) and more than transfer students with the more general AS-T 2 degree.

Unexpectedly, they are more on par with transfer students with no degree at all, as shown in Figure 21.

**Figure 21: Public engineering graduates in 2018-19 who entered with an AS-T 2 earned the fewest median credits toward their degree out of all transfer students.**



Source: WSAC staff analysis of public four-year bachelor's degree completions for academic year 2018-19 from ERDC.

Furthermore, the number of credits that CTC transfers (except those with a DTA) took toward an engineering bachelor's degree increased over time. And, students with an Engineering AS-T 2/MRP performed virtually the same as CTC transfers without a transfer degree over the last three years. Another observation unique to the Engineering AS-T 2/MRP is that engineering graduates with this MRP who received the WCG progressively took fewer median credits toward their bachelor's degree than those without the WCG. It is not clear why this is the case. One hypothesis is that students with WCG know that funding runs out after a certain number of credits. At the time of these data, WCG could not be used beyond 225 credits.

### *The DTA is ineffective for STEM majors*

DTA effectiveness is not this report's focus, but it is hard to ignore that transfers with a DTA who earn a Biology degree or Engineering degree or who graduate in an AS-T 1 or AS-T 2 major area from a public baccalaureate took the most credits toward their bachelor's degree, even more than graduates in those areas who transferred from a CTC without a degree. STEM graduates with a DTA and the WCG had the highest number of median credits toward their degree, with Engineering graduates being the most negatively affected. Those students ended up taking an average of 256 credits between 2015-16 and 2018-19, or 76 more than the 180 required. This equates to more than one-and-half academic years. It is unknown how WCG recipients paid for the credits they took beyond the 225 covered by the WCG at that time. Although WCG rules changed in 2020 to allow up to five years of full-time use, future DTA earners will still run out of funding if the trend continues.

Using this report's definition of effectiveness, which is the number of median credits taken by a transfer student compared to a direct entry student, the DTA is clearly ineffective for the STEM majors in this report. This is evidence that CTC students interested in a STEM bachelor's degree should be guided toward an appropriate major-specific transfer degree. However, more public STEM bachelor's degrees are awarded to DTA earners than to Biology DTA/MRP, Engineering DTA/MRP, AS-T 1, or AS-T 2 earners. More research is needed to determine why this is the case. This information could help institutions guide students into the right transfer degree for their needs.

### **What is the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on transfer degree effectiveness?**

There is no doubt that the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted every aspect of higher education, including transfer. What is unknown is the magnitude of the impact, especially for BIPOC students and low-income white students who bore the brunt of the pandemic financially, educationally, and psychologically.<sup>13</sup>

### *Reduced CTC enrollments in Fall 2020 could lead to a smaller transfer pipeline*

In Fall 2020, CTC transfer degree program enrollments fell by eight percent compared to Fall 2019, with steeper declines for students who identified as American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, or Hispanic.<sup>14</sup> Low-income students, older students, part-time students, and new students suffered large declines in overall CTC enrollment, as well.<sup>15</sup>

The negative impact on community college enrollment for Fall 2020 is a result of prospective students cancelling or altering their plans or current students taking fewer classes. Unfortunately, students who

wait to start their education are more likely to never enroll and those who take a break from college may never complete.<sup>16</sup> Reduced enrollments plus a potential for continued reduced enrollments could lead to a noticeable drop in CTC students (especially underserved students) transferring to four-year institutions in one to three years – the time frame when students typically transfer.<sup>17</sup>

### ***Washington is poised to tackle transfer inequities amplified by COVID-19***

At the same time, a change in plans for many college students has meant an unexpected increase in student mobility, indicating that strong transfer policies and practices are more important than ever.<sup>18</sup> After all, transfer student outcomes were inequitable even before the pandemic.<sup>19</sup> The Lumina Foundation and the Aspen Institute offer guidance on promising policies and practices that states and institutions can implement to negate the impact of COVID-19 on transfer:<sup>20</sup>

- Demonstrate that transfer student success is a heightened priority.
- Design academic policies that better facilitate transfer success.
- Provide clear, concise, and culturally responsive communication, as well as trained transfer specialists or navigators, who can help explain transfer pathways for staff, faculty, and students.
- Regularly monitor data on important transfer indicators to find inequities and deploy solutions.
- Employ technology to automate transcript evaluation and auto-renewal for state financial aid.

Washington's strong partnerships among postsecondary sectors and its commitment to funding students are assets as the state moves forward. For example, public and private four-year institutions immediately came together after CTCs moved to remote learning to release a joint statement for CTC transfer students.<sup>21</sup> The statement included a contact person, one specifically designated to help transfer students, for each public and ICW institution. More importantly, the Washington College Grant offers state aid to more students for more types of education, making it easier to afford college, even during a pandemic.

## **Transfer updates**

In addition to measuring transfer effectiveness, this report also includes transfer degree updates and other transfer efficiency improvements since the 2019 report.

### **Updated transfer degrees**

#### ***An updated Pre-Nursing DTA/MRP went into effect Summer 2020***

There had been no updates to the degree since its creation in 2005. The changes were minor and included a required review date of 2025.

#### ***A new Engineering AS-T 2/MRP went into effect in Fall 2020***

A fourth pathway was added. The four pathways are now: Bioengineering and Chemical Engineering, Computer and Electrical Engineering, Civil and Mechanical Engineering, and Materials Science and Manufacturing Engineering.

### Other improvements in transfer efficiency

#### *Intercollege Relations Commission handbook update*

The Intercollege Relations Commission (ICRC) manages a handbook that includes statewide transfer policies and guidance that all member institutions use to ensure consistent transfer experiences for Washington's students.<sup>n</sup> The handbook was updated in December 2020 and can be found at <https://www.wa-council.org/icrc/>.

#### *Transfer Institute 2.0*

In July 2019, transfer partners and institutional groups gathered in Walla Walla to continue the transfer improvement work initiated by the Summer 2017 Transfer Institute.<sup>o</sup> Guests from the Community College Research Center and SBCTC shared data and research about barriers to transfer success for Washington's CTC students. Barriers included low and inequitable transfer and completion rates, unclear transfer pathways, and inadequate transfer advising,

The Community College Research Institute (CCRI) also shared findings from its High-Performing Transfer Partnerships (HPTP) Study. These are partnerships between two- and four-years that show more successful transfer outcomes for historically underserved students than other schools in the study. CCRI shared policies and practices between institutional pairs that increased transfer student success. They include focusing on racial equity, prioritizing partnerships, and funding collaboration.<sup>22</sup>

#### *Pave the Way transfer sessions*

WSAC's 2019 Pave the Way conference offered three transfer-related sessions. It included one from CCRI about HPTP, one about statewide online articulation systems, and another about advising students across institutional sectors. The advising session included innovative ways to advise students as they move from sector to sector. It was one of the most popular sessions in the conference, showing how important seamless transfer is for postsecondary success.

### Guiding questions for future transfer degree analysis

Since so many Washington students are transfer students, no one report could possibly cover all relevant transfer outcomes and data. The following items are considerations for future analysis. These questions should also study outcomes across demographics, such as race/ethnicity combined with income or gender, to further identify students not being served by current transfer policies and practices.

#### *What is the transfer process like for students?*

Analyzing transfer data is useful for determining gaps and successes, but it does not describe what the actual process of transfer is like for students. Furthermore, this report presents only one type of transfer.

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<sup>n</sup> The Intercollege Relations Commission (ICRC) formed in 1970 and developed the first DTA. Its goal is to facilitate transfer between institutions for all Washington students pursuing bachelor's degrees. The commission is comprised of representatives from all public two- and four-year institutions, as well as many independent institutions.

<sup>o</sup> See the 2019 Transfer Report for more information about the 2017 Transfer Institute

It does not consider the multiple situations and possibilities that occur across student populations. A combination of student focus groups and further analysis could answer questions about the following:

- How do BIPOC students learn about and experience the transfer process?
- Do all credits transfer when students transfer from one institution to another? If not, how many and what type of credits do not transfer?
- What is the effect of attending multiple community and technical colleges on transfer success and bachelor's degree completion? Who is more likely to attend multiple colleges on the way to a degree?
- Is the transfer experience different depending on what kind of transfer degree a student has? Or, what kind of bachelor's degree major they choose?
- What is the transfer experience like without a transfer degree?

### ***Why do students leave the transfer pipeline?***

This report mainly focused on the students who made it through the transfer pipeline. But we also need to know more about who intended to transfer but never did and who transferred but never finished their bachelor's degree.

### ***What happens to students who earn a Nursing or Pre-Nursing DTA/MRP?***

The 2019 report also did not analyze outcomes for students who transferred into BSN programs due to data limitations. Because nurses are in high demand in Washington and because a racially diverse nursing workforce would better serve Washington's increasingly racially diverse population, it is imperative that a separate study be completed that focuses on the outcomes of CTC BIPOC students who want to earn a BSN.<sup>23</sup>

### ***Where do Running Start participants fit within the transfer landscape?***

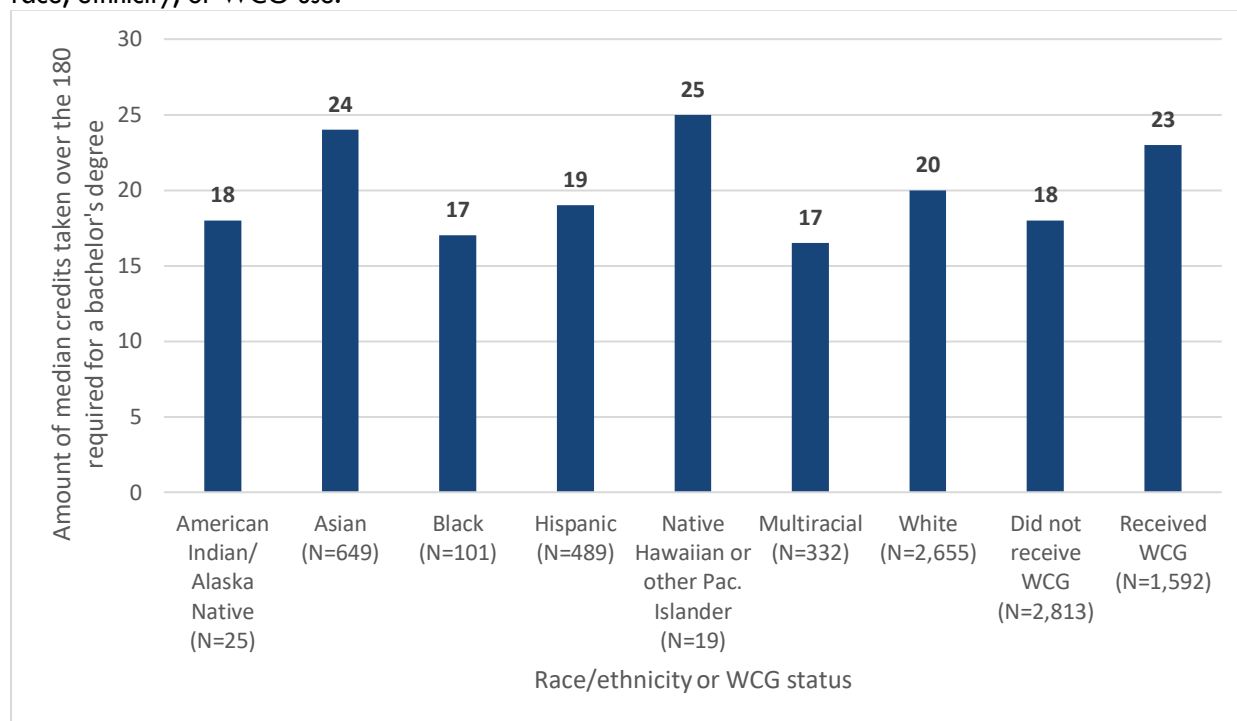
Running Start students who go to a four-year institution after high school deserve a separate analysis because they continue to earn a growing portion of transfer degrees. In 2019-20, Running Start students earned 21 percent of total transfer degrees awarded.<sup>24</sup> Although this report does not separate out which students earned their transfer degree through Running Start, it did find that students who took at least one Running Start class in high school and go on to earn a bachelor's degree from a public four-year institution took the most credits toward their bachelor's degree compared to other students. Over time, they have taken about 20 more credits than is required for a bachelor's degree, which is equal to more than a term of full-time study.<sup>p</sup> Figure 22 shows the number of credits earned by bachelor's degree earners who were in Running Start across race/ethnicity and WCG status in 2018-19.

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<sup>p</sup> It is unknown if the credits were taken while students were in Running Start or after they entered the four-year institution. It is also unknown what the effect of earning a transfer degree in Running Start is on credit taking.



Figure 22: 2018-19 public bachelor’s degree earners who took Running Start in high school earned more than a term’s worth of quarter credits beyond the 180 required for a bachelor’s degree, regardless of race, ethnicity, or WCG use.



Source: WSAC staff analysis of public four-year bachelor’s degree completions for academic year 2018-19 from ERDC.

### How do CTC bachelor’s degrees support transfer?

Washington joins about half of states in offering community college baccalaureate (CCB) degrees.<sup>9</sup> These degrees are completion tools meant to support historically underserved students.<sup>25</sup> Almost all Washington CTCs offer bachelor’s degrees. All but one (Bellevue College’s Bachelor of Science in Computer Science) are created for transfer students – they typically require two years of college credit or an associate degree. Because most are applied science degrees, they make it easier for students with associate of applied science (AAS) degrees to transfer.<sup>†</sup> Washington’s CCB degrees were not included in this report due to data limitations, but they should be included in future transfer research as they are gaining in popularity. About 1,400 of Washington’s bachelor’s degrees earned in 2019-20 were awarded at a CTC, almost triple the number awarded five years prior.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Most of Washington’s CCB degrees are Bachelor of Applied Science (BAS) degrees.

<sup>†</sup> Generally, AAS degrees will not transfer to four-year institutions, although there are exceptions.

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- <sup>10</sup> SBCTC Credentials Awarded dashboard, accessed 12/21/20 at <https://www.sbctc.edu/colleges-staff/research/data-public/credentials-awarded-dashboard.aspx>
- <sup>11</sup> SBCTC (January 2017). Role of Community and Technical Colleges in Producing Nursing Graduates: Rethinking the Pipeline for Guided Pathways. <https://www.sbctc.edu/resources/documents/colleges-staff/research/workforce-research/17-1-producing-nursing-grads-and-rethinking-pipeline-for-guided-pathways.pdf>
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## Appendix A: Student Entry Definitions

### Public baccalaureates institutions

Entry Type	2021 Transfer Report Definition
Direct Entry	Bachelor’s degree earners with less than 40 noninstitutional quarter credits applied toward their degree. This includes credits earned through dual credit, academic credit for prior learning, and credits from other institutions. Students in this category may also be in the RS_TRANSFER category.
Running Start Transfer	Bachelor’s degree earners who participated in Running Start prior to entry. This may include students who earned a transfer degree through Running Start. Students in this category may also be in other categories. First term of enrollment does not include terms where student is enrolled in a dual credit program.
CTC Transfer with Transfer Degree	Bachelor’s degree earners who earned a transfer degree (any kind) prior to entry. Students in this category are also in the category that corresponds with the transfer degree they earned. Includes students who earned a transfer degree through Running Start, so students in this category may also be in the Running Start Transfer category. First term of enrollment does not include terms where student is enrolled in a dual credit program.
Transfer with DTA	Bachelor’s degree earners who earned a DTA prior to entering entry. Includes students who earned a DTA through Running Start. Students in this category are also in the CTC Transfer with Transfer Degree category. They may also be in the Running Start Transfer category. Students who earn multiple transfer degrees are included in each relevant associate degree category.
Transfer with AS-T 1	Bachelor’s degree earners who earned an Associate of Science-Transfer Track 1 associate degree prior to entry. Includes students who earned this degree through Running Start. Students in this category are also in the CTC Transfer with Transfer Degree category. They may also be in the Running Start Transfer category. Students who earn multiple transfer degrees are included in each relevant associate degree category.
Transfer with AS-T 2	Bachelor’s degree earners who earned an Associate of Science-Transfer Track 2 associate degree prior to entry. Includes students who earned this degree through Running Start. Students in this category are also in the CTC Transfer with Transfer Degree category. They may also be in the Running Start Transfer category. Students who earn multiple transfer degrees are included in each relevant associate degree category.
Transfer with Biology MRP	Bachelor’s degree earners who earned an Associate in Biology DTA/Major Related Program (Biology DTA/MRP) prior to entry. Includes students who earned this degree through Running Start. Students in this category are also in the CTC Transfer with Transfer Degree category. They may also be in the Running Start Transfer category. Students who earn multiple transfer degrees are included in each relevant associate degree category.

## 2021 Washington transfer degree effectiveness update

Transfer with Business MRP	Bachelor's degree earners who earned an Associate in Business DTA/MRP prior to entry. Includes students who earned this degree through Running Start. Students in this category are also in the CTC Transfer with Transfer Degree category. They may also be in the Running Start Transfer category. Students who earn multiple transfer degrees are included in each relevant associate degree category.
Transfer with Engineering MRP	Bachelor's degree earners who earned an Associate in Engineering AS-T 2/MRP prior to entry. Includes students who earned this degree through Running Start. Students in this category are also in the CTC Transfer with Transfer Degree category. They may also be in the Running Start Transfer category. Students who earn multiple transfer degrees are included in each relevant associate degree category.
CTC Transfer, No Degree	Bachelor's degree earners who: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Had 40 or more noninstitutional quarter credits applied toward their degree.</li> <li>2. Did not earn a transfer degree prior to entry (transfer degree could have been earned after transfer).</li> <li>3. Earned 20 or more CTC quarter credits prior to entry.</li> </ol> <p>First term of enrollment does not include terms where student is enrolled in a dual credit program. Students in this category may also be in the RS_TRANSFER category.</p>
Non-CTC Transfer	Bachelor's degree earners who: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Had 40 or more noninstitutional quarter credits applied toward their degree.</li> <li>2. Did not earn a transfer degree prior to entry (transfer degree could have been earned after transfer).</li> <li>3. Earned less than 20 CTC quarter credits prior to entry.</li> </ol> <p>First term of enrollment does not include terms where student is enrolled in a dual credit program. Students in this category may also be in the RS_TRANSFER category.</p>

### ICW institutions

Entry Type	2021 Transfer Report Definition
All	All bachelor's degree earners, regardless of major or entry type (number of graduates, not number of degrees awarded)
Direct Entry	Bachelor's degree earners with less than 40 noninstitutional quarter credits (27 semester credits) and no associate degree earned before entering the ICW institution. Noninstitutional credits are those earned outside the institution (includes transfer credit, dual credit, and prior learning credit).
Other Transfer	Bachelor's degree earners with 40 or more noninstitutional quarter credits (27 semester credits) and no transfer associate degree earned before entering the ICW

## 2021 Washington transfer degree effectiveness update

	institution. Noninstitutional credits are those earned outside the institution (includes transfer credit, dual credit, and prior learning credit).
CTC Transfer with Degree	Bachelor's degree earners who earned a transfer associate degree from a WA community or technical college prior to entering the ICW institution. Includes graduates who earned a transfer associate degree through Running Start.

### Appendix B: Data sources

#### Public baccalaureate institutions

ERDC compiled data from SBCTC and public four-year records and shared with WSAC in January 2021. The data was anonymized aggregate data for students who graduated in academic years 2015-16 through 2018-19. It included data from all six public baccalaureate institutions. All semester credits were converted to quarter credits by multiplying semester credits by 1.5.

#### ICW institutions

Participating institutions included:

- Gonzaga University
- Saint Martin's University
- Seattle Pacific University
- Seattle University
- Walla Walla University
- Heritage University
- Whitworth University

ICW compiled the data and shared with WSAC in December 2020. Each participating institution sent anonymized aggregate data for students who graduated in academic years 2015-16 through 2019-20. The data included the number of median institutional and non-institutional credits earned. It did not include overall median credits earned. All semester credits were converted to quarter credits by multiplying semester credits by 1.5. Since the data was separated by institution, WSAC used the average median to determine median credits earned across all seven institutions.

## About the Washington Student Achievement Council

The Washington Student Achievement Council is committed to increasing educational opportunities and attainment in Washington. The Council has three main functions:

- Lead statewide strategic planning to increase educational attainment.
- Administer programs that help people access and pay for college.
- Advocate for the economic, social, and civic benefits of higher education.

The Council has nine members. Four members represent each of Washington's major education sectors: four-year public baccalaureates, four-year private colleges, public community and technical colleges, and K-12 public schools. Five are citizen members, including one current student.

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