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December 14, 2009

MEMORANDUM

TO: Legislative Education Study Committee

FR: Ms. Pamela Herman

**RE: STAFF SUMMARY: HIGHER EDUCATION DEPARTMENT 2009
ARTICULATION AND TRANSFER PROGRAM REPORT**

Since the enactment of the *Post-Secondary Education Articulation Act* in 1995, the Higher Education Department (HED), formerly the Commission on Higher Education, has been required to report to the Legislative Education Study Committee (LESC), the Legislative Finance Committee (LFC) and the Governor on the status of articulation programs and the transfer of students between public postsecondary institutions in the state.

According to HED, articulation programs “outline the process by which one institution matches its courses or requirements to coursework completed at another institution.” New Mexico law mandates that all institutions provide the articulation information that HED requires for development of the annual report by September 30 of each year, and requires that the report from HED report include:

- an analysis of:
 - the number of students transferring between campuses;
 - the number of credits being requested and accepted for transfer;
 - institutions denying transfer of credits and reasons for denial;
 - the progress of transfer students at receiving institutions;

- the average number of credit hours earned by graduating transfer students compared to the average number of credit hours earned by graduates who originated at the institution;
 - a summary of student complaints regarding articulation; and
 - data and other information obtained on both a statewide and individual institutional basis.
- outcomes with regard to such factors as transfer rates, persistence rates after transfer and graduation rates; and
 - identification of each institution against which a meritorious complaint has been filed concerning failure to accept credits earned in an approved transfer module, summarizing HED's recommendations with regard to those complaints.

2009 Articulation and Transfer Program Report

The attached HED *2009 Articulation and Transfer Program Report* addresses requirements in law. According to the report, rather than require institutions to provide information, HED states that it sent a brief survey to 24 public postsecondary institutions; however, not all institutions responded. The report contained the following data:

Transfer of Credits (pages 4-5)

Regarding transfer of credits, the report states that:

- the number of transfer credit evaluations requested varied widely from institution to institution, from just one evaluation request to 650 individual requests;
- the number of credit hours for which transfer was requested per student also varied widely by college, from five or fewer credits to an average of over 70 per student, for an overall average of approximately 25-25 credits per student;
- the percentage of evaluated credit hours that were accepted was at a "high level";
- reasons for rejection of credit requests were:
 - most commonly, the student earned a grade of "D" in the course; but also
 - the course was remedial or developmental;
 - the credit was earned at a non-accredited institution;
 - the credit was duplicated at the awarding institution;
 - the credit was for an upper division course; and
 - the course was audit-only or failed; and
- factors that institutions considered in determining transfer of credits were, most commonly, individual course grades, but also a student's grade point average (GPA) and academic standing.

Transfer Rates (page 5)

In terms of transfer rates during the 2008 academic year, the report states that:

- 17,440 students transferred to a state public postsecondary institution, of whom 8,175, or approximately 46.8 percent, were self-identified as in-state transfers;
- approximately 60 percent transferred *to* two-year institutions, including branches;
- the ratio of transfer students to total statewide enrollment was approximately 5.5 percent; and
- Hispanic students were slightly over-represented among transfer students.

Persistence and Graduation Rates (pages 5-6)

Regarding persistence and graduation rates, the report notes that students who start at a four-year institution are likelier to earn a bachelor's degree in six years if they do *not* transfer; but students who start at a two-year institution are likelier to earn either an associate or a bachelor's degree within a defined time frame if they *do* transfer. Of a cohort tracked from academic year (AY) 2000 to AY 2009:

- *starting at four-year institutions*, of 4,870 first-time, full-time freshmen:
 - 1,414 (29 percent) transferred at least once in their academic career;
 - 42 percent of the total cohort earned bachelor's degrees within six years; and
 - 37 percent of those who transferred earned bachelor's degrees within that time;
- *starting at two-year institutions*, of 4,414 first-time, full-time freshman degree-seeking students:
 - 741 (17 percent) transfer at least once in their academic career;
 - 8.0 percent of the total cohort earned an associate degree within three years;
 - 11 percent of those who transferred received an associate degree or certificate within that time;
 - 19 percent of the total cohort earned an associate degree within nine years;
 - 32 percent of those who transferred earned an associate degree within nine years;
 - 25 percent of the total cohort earned a bachelor's or lesser degree within nine years; and
 - 57 percent of those who transferred earned a bachelor's or lesser degree within nine years.

Other Issues (pages 6-9)

The report touches on other matters, including:

- *the current status of the General Education Common Core Transfer Module and Program Transfer Modules* (pages 6-7), also addressed in a November 2009 LESC staff report on the implementation by higher education of P-20 provisions in law;
- *challenges of the articulation and transfer program*, including transfer credit denial and the student appeals process (pages 7-8). Here, HED does not identify any institution

against which a meritorious complaint was filed for failure to accept credits earned in an approved transfer module;

- *areas of opportunity and program improvement* (pages 8-9), including improved dissemination of correct information to students about transferrable courses; and
- *the HED Articulation Task Force* (page 9).

2009 Articulation and Transfer Program Report

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New Mexico Higher Education Department

(www.hed.state.nm.us)

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***New Mexico Higher Education Department
P-20 Policy and Programs Division***

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MEMORANDUM

TO: Legislative Education Study Committee
Senator Cynthia Nava, Chair, Legislative Education Study Committee

FR: Dr. Rick Scott, Ally Hudson M.Ed., and Yash Morimoto

RE: NMHED REPORT: Articulation and Transfer Program Report

INTRODUCTION

A 2009 report by The Pell Institute (Smith, 2009) indicated that articulation programs outline “the process by which one institution matches its courses or requirements to coursework completed at another institution [in order to] help assure students that the courses they complete will meet transfer and major requirements, and will not have to be repeated at the institution to which they are transferring”

(http://www.pellinstitute.org/pdf/COE_Pell_Report_layout_3.pdf).

Beyond this fundamental purpose, articulation and transfer programs are frequently identified as having a positive influence on a number of important educational issues, among them:

- Student retention;
- Matriculation from high school into the higher education system;
- Graduation from various tiers of the educational system; and
- Obtainment of professional certificates, Associates, Bachelors, and other Professional degrees.

The Pell Institute Report (2009) further suggests that the transfer function be placed as a central academic mission of colleges since they are “the entry point to postsecondary education for low-income and first-generation college students of all races, including those from historically underrepresented populations.”

This report will provide an overview of the current status of implementation of the key provisions in state statute 21-1B-6. Reporting. The statute includes requirements for:

- Updates on the status of articulation program and the transfer of students between institutions;
- Analyses of successful credit transfers, denial of credit transfer, progress of students at the receiving institution, and credit hour earning for transfer students;
- Summaries on student complaints and institutional appeal procedures;
- Review of the General Education Common Core Transfer Module; and
- Reports on existing and developing Program Transfer Modules from a variety of disciplines.

It has been argued that successful articulation and transfer programs “help to demystify and humanize the university [experience]” (Smith, 2009). As New Mexico continues to focus on matriculation and graduation within the P-20 educational system, articulation and transfer programs will be crucial in assuring student success.

LESC INTEREST IN ARTICULATION AND TRANSFER PROGRAMS

Historical Context

In 1995 legislation was passed, codified in NMSA 1978, Section 21-1B, that charged the Commission of Higher Education to “establish and maintain a comprehensive statewide plan to provide for the articulation of educational programs and facilitate the transfer of students between institutions.” It further required the creation of “transfer modules [that] shall include a common general education core component of not less than thirty-five semester hours.” The Legislative Education Study Committee (LESC) continued to hear testimony and study issues related to student success through seamless transfer throughout the state’s public preschool through postsecondary (P-20) education system. A key component to improving student success has been the focus on removing barriers between each level of the system. To address this challenge, the LESL has taken a formal interest in articulation and transfer programs – sometimes called articulation or transfer modules. Senate Bill 161 in 2005 further clarified the intent of the general education core transfer module and specified a timeline for the creation of discipline transfer modules. It also further specified the complaint process and required reporting.

The Higher Education Department has facilitated an Articulation Task Force to oversee all articulation and transfer efforts. Reporting directly to the Articulation Task Force is an Assessment Task Force which works on the assessment of General Education Core courses, as well as discipline subgroups for each General Education Core Area and each Discipline Transfer Module.

Improving transfer rates “requires a strong, culturally-sensitive leadership committed to involving all segments of the campus community – including faculty, administrators, and staff” (Smith, 2009). The LESL has charged the New Mexico Higher Education Department (NMHED) to report on the status of said programs on an annual basis, and in doing so, requires a multifaceted analysis of the programs through all stages of the P-20 system.

NMHED Review of the Application and Utility of the Programs

To examine the progress of articulation and transfer programs, NMHED staff reviewed a variety of documentation (i.e. rules, forms, correspondence, reports) related to articulation and transfer, and sent a brief survey to each of the 24 public institutions of higher education in New Mexico working with the programs (response rate of ~75% percent). This questionnaire is not offered as a scientific survey but is merely an indication of the sorts of experiences with the articulation and transfer modules occurring at the institutional level throughout New Mexico.

NMHED staff examination of the articulation and transfer programs focuses on three fundamental issues:

1. The success of the programs.
2. The challenges of the programs.
3. Possible options to improve the programs.

The report will show that while progress has been made in the areas of program development and implementation, areas of opportunity still remain – particularly in terms of maintaining accuracy within all of the transfer modules.

In its other main sections the report discusses:

- Transfer Credit Requests
- General Education Common Core Transfer Module
- Program Transfer Modules
- Transfer Credit Denial: Student Appeals Process
- Areas of Opportunity: Program Improvement
- Articulation Task Force

Complete listings of the General Education Common Core and all existing Program Transfer Modules can be found on the NMHED webpage. The direct web address is:

<http://hed.state.nm.us/content.asp?CustComKey=193242&CategoryKey=195796&pn=Page&DomName=hed.state.nm.us>

Success of the Articulation and Transfer Programs

Transfer Credit Requests

The number of students that requested a transfer credit evaluation during the 2008 academic year varied widely among the state's institutions of higher education. One institution reported a single student evaluation request while another institution cited over 650 unique transfer credit evaluations. Additionally, the number of credit hours requested for evaluation was quite disparate. Survey respondents indicated that for some students an evaluation of 5 or fewer credits was necessary. For other institutions the average number of credits approached over 70 per student. In averaging the survey respondents approximately 25-35 credit hours were reviewed for each student requesting a transfer credit evaluation.

Of the evaluated credit hours, survey respondents indicated a high level of credit acceptance. The most commonly articulated reason for credit rejection was that of a grade of 'D.' Although these policies are drafted and enforced at the institutional level, the majority of institutions do not accept a grade of 'D' for core courses or as a part of the student's degree plan. It is important to note that some institutions require a grade of 'C'

or better for core courses such as English Composition and College Algebra in order for it to count toward a degree.

Further reasons for credit denial included:

- Remedial or developmental course work
- Credit earned from a non-accredited institution
- Duplication of credit from the awarding institution
- Upper division course credit
- Audit-only or failed courses

In the process of determining the transfer of credits a number of metrics are consulted by the institution. These include a student's GPA, individual course grades, and academic standing. While one institution noted that "the GPA is looked at by the Admissions Office to determine Academic Standing," a student's GPA was not identified as the most prominent factor in determining credit transferability. Instead, individual course grades were the most commonly identified variable in deciding the acceptance of transfer credit. Over 90% of the survey respondents indicated course grades as the most significant determining factor.

Transfer Rates

In terms of the rate of transfer for New Mexico students NMHED data indicates that during the 2008 Academic year 17,440 students transferred from another institution. Of these transfers 8,165 students self-identified as an in-state transfer. Data further suggests that these students tend to transfer as freshmen or undergraduate, non-degree students. Approximately 60% of these transfers are to two-year institutions (including branches) rather than to four-year institutions (40%).

Compared to total statewide enrollment, the ratio of students who transfer is between 5% and 6% (Fall 08 = 6%, Spring 09 = 5 %).

With the exception of undergraduate non-degree transfer students, the average age of transfer students is a couple of years older than traditional first-time freshmen. Hispanic students make up a slightly larger proportion of the transfer student population when compared to enrollment demographics: 2% higher for the entire state. When compared to enrollment for the entire state, freshmen, junior, and senior transfer students tend to matriculate as part-time students.

Persistence and Graduation Rates

Students who begin at the 4-year institution:

NMHED data suggests that students transfer at different times and for different reasons within their academic career. Therefore, it is useful to focus on the graduation rate when analyzing student success.

When you track 4,870 first-time, full-time freshmen who are degree seeking from Academic Year (AY) 2000 to AY 2009, 29% (1,414) of this student cohort transferred at least once in their academic career. When looking at the cohort as a whole: 42% of the students received a Bachelor's degree within 6 years; only 37% of those cohort students who transferred received a Bachelor's degree within the same time period.

However, if you track the same group of students for 9 years the graduation rate gap closes significantly. A 9-year graduation rate for Bachelor's degree students who have transferred jumps to 48% while the general cohort's 9-year graduation rate increases to 49%.

Students who start out at the 2-year institution:

In the 2000 AY cohort for two-year institutions, there are 4,414 first-time, full-time freshmen, degree-seeking students. Of the cohort, 17% (741) of students transfer at least once in their academic career and 11% of these transfer students receive an Associate degree or a Certificate within 3 years. The overall graduation rate for the cohort is 8%. This data directly contrasts to what is observed with the students who began at the 4-year institutions (where transfer students have a lower graduation rate than the general cohort). Furthermore, the graduation rate gap between those who transfer and those who remain at a 2-year institution increases with time. If you track the same group of students for 9 years, the graduation rate for the general cohort group that receives an Associate degree or a Certificate is 19%. Comparatively, those students who transfer have a 32% graduation rate:

If we expand our analysis to include Bachelor's degree attainment for transfer students that start out at 2-year institutions, the graduation rate for students who receive a Bachelor's degree or less within 9 years increases to 57%. In comparison, the overall cohort attainment rate remains at 25%.

General Education Common Core Transfer Module

While a few outliers indicate that few transfer credit requests originate from the General Education Common Core (GECC) transfer module, the majority of survey respondents indicated that over 85% of the reviewed courses fell into this category.

Per its recent inheritance of articulation and transfer responsibilities, the GECC transfer module is updated by NMHED, P-20 Division staff on a regular basis. New courses may be submitted for evaluation and inclusion into the GECC module on a semi-annual basis. The module is seen as a living document that reflects both the evolving goals of the curriculum and the needs of the student. A full listing of courses offered in the GECC module can be found in Appendix (1).

Inherently linked to the GECC module, as well as all program transfer modules (see below section), is the existence of relevant advising services offered by the institution of higher education (IHE). The Pell Institute argues that "advisors are important not only to offer academic support, but also to act as institutional 'transfer agents' who assist

students in navigating 'the institutional culture of higher education'...[Some institutions employ] intrusive advising, whereby students are mandated to meet with advisors on a regular basis" (Smith, 2009). Respondents to the NMHED survey expounded upon their advisory services in the following ways:

- "[We] would like to support and sustain HED's present efforts to update the state matrix and assure its accuracy" (ENMU-Portales);
- "We have attempted to align the core requirements for all of our associate degrees with the General Education Common Core so as to maximize the transferability of courses for our students" (Mesalands Community College); and
- "The review by the Office of the Registrar takes place within a few days of receipt of the transcript and the student is notified in writing of the review" (Luna Community College).

Program Transfer Modules

New Mexico Statute 21-1B-6. Reporting requires:

F. The general education core, the discipline module for business and early childhood education and the common course numbering and naming system for all courses in those modules shall be effective by spring semester 2006, and the printed materials of all institutions shall conform to the system by fall 2006. A minimum of three additional discipline modules shall be effective not later than fall semester 2007 and an additional three discipline modules by fall semester 2008.

In compliance with this statute the NMHED has met the requirement for discipline modules in the areas of Business Administration, Early Childhood Education, and the General Education Common Core. New additions to the discipline modules have been completed in the areas of Criminal Justice, Teacher Education, and General Engineering. Complete versions of each of these modules can be found in Appendix (2) of this report.

Currently in developmental form are modules for the disciplines of Nursing, Computer Science, Physical Science, Film, and Social Work. The Articulation Task Force hopes to have these modules completed by the end of the 2010 calendar year. For additional details on the progress of these articulation modules please see the section below entitled "Articulation Task Force."

The development of institutional articulation agreements "helps get students on track not only for transfer to a four-year institution but also within a specific subject area. The colleges develop individually tailored degree plans that students can continually consult in order to make sure they are taking the coursework they need to transfer to their degree program of interest" (Smith, 2009).

Challenges of the Articulation and Transfer Programs

Transfer Credit Denial: Student Appeals Process

As noted in previous sections of this report, not all transfer credit requests are granted. For this reason “it is important that [college] staff make information about articulation agreements readily available to students (and to prospective students throughout the community) through outreach, advising, and orientation” (Smith, 2009). Respondents of the NMHED survey were thorough in their explanation of where transfer information is located, advertised, and what options are available to those students whose transfer credits are denied.

In the case of advertising articulation and transfer programs, 100% of the respondents stated that the information could be found in the course catalog. Approximately 90% of respondents also identified their institutional website as an additional host for articulation information. A few respondents recounted procedures wherein students received a form, letter, and/or other written attachment that outlined articulation and transfer policies upon enrollment in their institution. One institution stated that the “system of transferable General Education courses is shown in [their] degree plan worksheets.”

In terms of a formal student appeals process, respondents outlined the following:

- “The student can request reconsideration by the registrar. If still unsatisfied, the student can follow the complaint process or contact NMHED” (Northern New Mexico College);
- “We advise [students] to try taking CLEP tests” (Western New Mexico University);
- “The student may work with the Department Chair of the content area to resolve the issue. The student may also appeal a Department Chair’s decision with the Dean of the College” (Eastern New Mexico University-Portales); and
- “Students may appeal to the Academic Standards and Issue Committee” (Mesalands Community College).

Areas of Opportunity: Program Improvement

As with any program there is always room for improvement. Articulation and transfer programs within the New Mexico P-20 system are no exception. As expressed in response to the NMHED survey, the single largest issue facing institutions in regards to their articulation and transfer programs is that of maintaining accurate information on the Department’s website. While recent efforts to update the module were recognized in a number of responses, the emphasis on continual updates was communicated with a sense of extreme urgency by over 80% of respondents.

Other areas of opportunity were defined as follows:

- Students’ misunderstanding that pre-collegiate courses are not included in the transfer matrices;
- Students’ misunderstanding that courses that are not applicable to a degree plan at the receiving institution are not acceptable as transfer credits;

- Creation of and adherence to a clear and simple process for adding courses to the state-wide transfer module(s); and
- Seamless electronic transfer of student records and transcripts.

As a policy suggestion one respondent from Luna Community College stated, “I would like to see an across the board policy that D’s in General Education courses are not to be considered eligible for transfer, and clearer guidance on 2-year schools accepting upper division courses for transfer.”

Articulation Task Force

The Articulation Task Force is facilitated by the NMHED to discuss and approve changes to articulation/transfer courses and modules. Reporting to the Task Force are discipline subgroups for each of the five General Education Core Areas (Area I Communications, Area II Mathematics, Area III Laboratory Science, Area IV Social/Behavioral Science, and Area V Humanities and Fine Arts), subgroups for each of the specific discipline transfer modules, and an Assessment Task Force that oversees the assessment of General Education Core courses.

The Articulation Task Force met in January and November of 2009. The NMHED is in the process of revitalizing the Task Force to ensure representation from all institutions of higher education. The area subgroups are also being revitalized.

Despite little engagement from the NMHED during its leadership turnovers, the Assessment Task Force has met monthly and carried on its mission. In the past, revisions to the General Education Common Core transfer module were submitted in the Fall. That process has been moved to the Spring and a timeline for this process has been added to the NMHED website:

(<http://inst.hed.state.nm.us/content.asp?CustComKey=195282&CategoryKey=208944&WebFileKey=448206&pn=webfilesview&DomName=inst.hed.state.nm.us>).

The webpage for the Articulation Task Force is being updated and redesigned to make it more user-friendly.