Michigan Transfer Landscape Analysis

Michigan Transfer Student Outcomes

MiLEAP Michigan Department of Lifelong Education, Advancement, and Potential | Office of Higher Education

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TRACKING TRANSFER OUTCOMES IN MICHIGAN — A NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

Tracking Transfer is a research collaboration among the Community College Research Center (CCRC), the Aspen Institute and the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) that reviews the effectiveness of the community college transfer pathway across multiple metrics. Initially published in 2017 and updated in 2024, these reports tell a compelling story about the plight of community college transfer students, nationally and within each state. Two NSC datasets were analyzed in the 2024 report, one focused on community colleges and one focused on bachelor's-granting institutions.

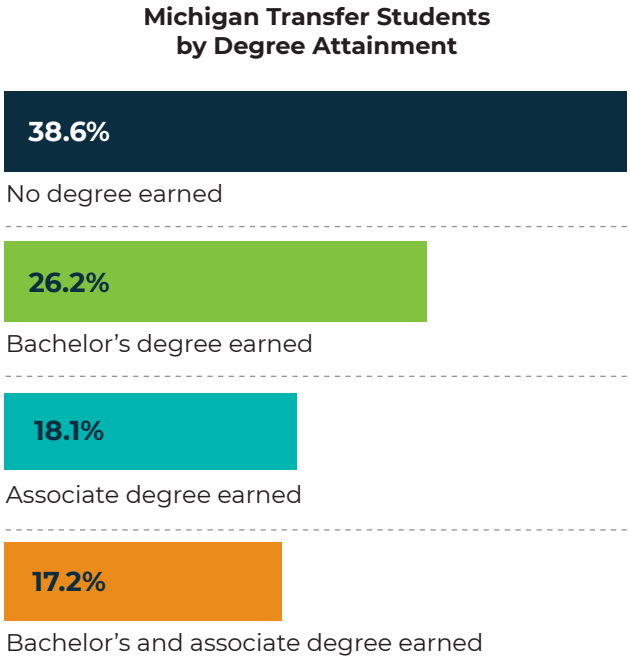
The main takeaway from these reports is that no state is doing great on these metrics. Similarly, while it is helpful for comparison, the average points are not aspirational. Reviewing Michigan's data against the national averages shows we are slightly above average for community college students transferring out. Both associate and bachelor's degree completion rates for Michigan transfer students are far too low. Likewise, data from the report on bachelor's-granting institutions shows that community college transfer students' retention rate was around 84%. Bachelor's completion rates for the cohort were at 55% within four years of transferring. Looking at all of these data points in disaggregated categories shows persistent equity gaps across historically marginalized populations.

The good news is that the Tracking Transfer data dashboard shows nearly all of these trends have been on the rise over time for Michigan community college transfer students. With renewed focus on transfer around the state, the time is right for continued progressive improvement.

Data From 2024 Tracking Transfer Report	Transfer-Out Rate	Transfer-With-Award Rate	Transfer-Out Bachelor's Completion Rate	Total Cohort Bachelor's Completion Rate	CC Transfer-In Retention Rate	CC Transfer Bachelor's Completion Rate (4 yrs)
National Average	33	44	48	16	81	52
Michigan Data	36	30	47	17	79	48

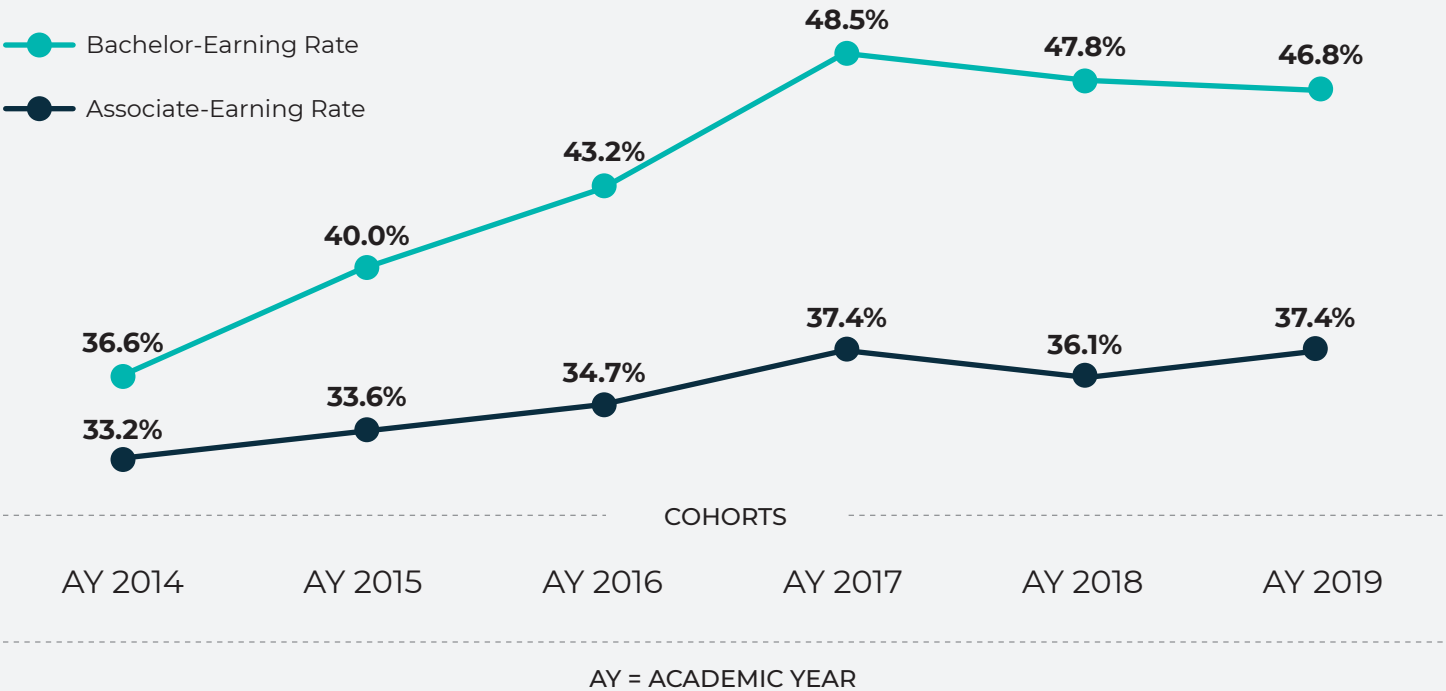
MICHIGAN TRANSFER STUDENT OUTCOMES — WHAT WE KNOW FROM STATE DATA

The data presented above shows aggregate detail from a national analytic sample of transfer students. Likewise, outcomes for students in our state analytic sample[1] showed mixed outcomes. An interesting takeaway from this analysis is that nearly half (47.4%) of students in our dataset who transferred and had not earned a bachelor's yet were still enrolled at a bachelor's-granting institution at the six-year mark. The largest population in our dataset were students who had earned no degree whatsoever after six years (38.6%). Those earning only a bachelor's degree were the next largest subset (26.2%). Students earning both an associate and bachelor's degree were the lowest group nearly 19% — this is the group who stands to gain the most from statewide efforts to better align curriculum between transfer institutions.



It was promising to see that rates for associate and bachelor's degree completion cohort over cohort had both been on the rise in our analytic sample. As colleges and universities in Michigan make additional progress on aligning curriculum for transfer between community colleges and universities, it is hoped that these upward trends will continue.

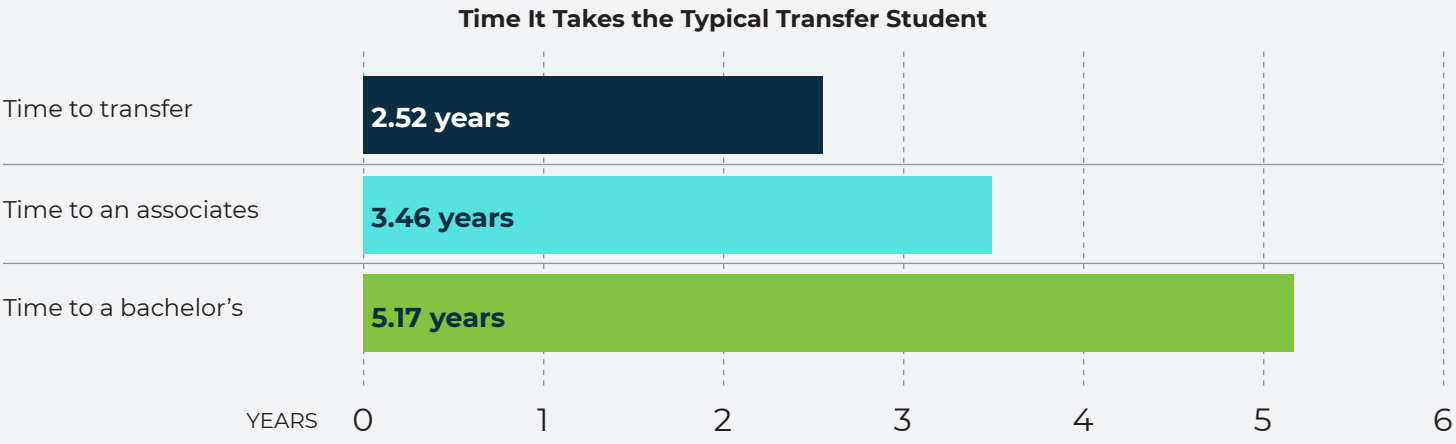
AWARD-EARNING RATES OVER TIME



AY = ACADEMIC YEAR

MICHIGAN TRANSFER STUDENTS' TIME-TO-SUCCESS MEASURES

It is also helpful to understand how long it takes transfer students to achieve success milestones on their transfer pathway. In our analytic sample, OHE considered transferring to a bachelor's-granting institution, earning an associate degree and earning a bachelor's degree as discrete success milestones. The figure below shows how long it typically took community college transfer students to achieve those milestones. Though it is popular to discuss transfer as a 2+2 pathway, our data indicates it takes transfer students longer at each junction in their transfer pathway, with those completing a bachelor's degree taking just over five years to complete.

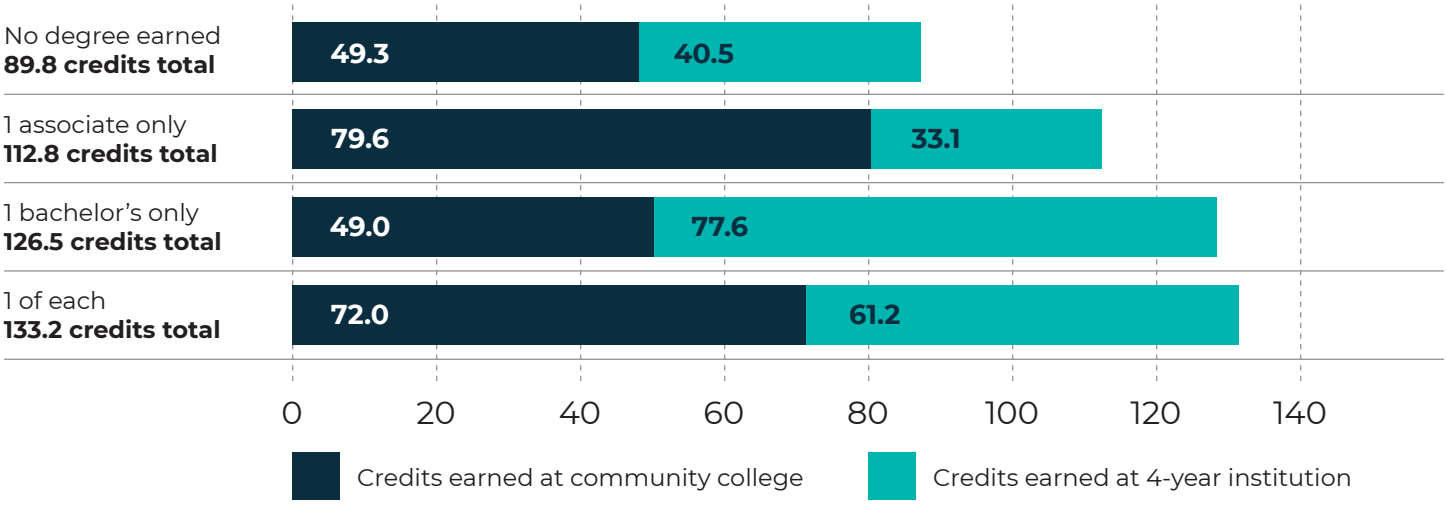


TRANSFER STUDENTS' CREDITS EARNED

Analysis of credits earned by transfer students complements the time-to-success averages discussed above. Due to reliability in reporting, only students transferring to Michigan public bachelor's-granting institutions are included in our credits earned analysis. This analysis revealed that most community college transfer students who earned degrees took more credits than required for those degrees on their transfer pathway. Both those students who had earned only an associate degree and those who earned both an associate and bachelor's took 10+ more credits than are typically required for associate degree completion. Transfer students who earned only a bachelor's degree were much closer to the typical bachelor's degree minimum credits required (120), earning 126.5 credits on average. On the other hand, transfer students who earned both their associate and bachelor's degrees typically earned 133.2 credits, with the majority being taken at the community college. Transfer students who had earned no degrees within six years had accumulated 89.8 credits, well exceeding the typical 60-credit minimum required to earn an associate degree.

These data can be further analyzed with more nuanced study of course-taking patterns and academic program enrollment, but first reactions to this aggregated data indicate misalignment between associate and bachelor's programs, particularly as students seem to take most excess credits at the community college level. Smoothing out curriculum alignment and articulation issues may improve these outcomes so students' pathways are more streamlined, more time efficient and less financially burdensome.

Credits per Sector for Transfers to Michigan Public Universities by Degree Completion



1. OHE Data Notes: This data comes from the Center for Educational Performance and Information. Our dataset is an amalgamation of five cohorts of first-time community college students who began their studies in academic years 2014 through 2019. The dataset is filtered to match the methods used by the National Student Clearinghouse for its tracking transfer project. This includes filtering out high school students and students enrolled concurrently at a community college and a four-year college/university, examining outcomes within six years of first enrollment and including only students whose first enrollment is in the fall semester of the first cohort year. This led to an analytic sample of 45,445 students.

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