

Michigan Transfer Landscape Analysis

Enrollment & Mobility Patterns of Michigan Transfer Students



Office of
Higher
Education

Brief #5 — May 2026

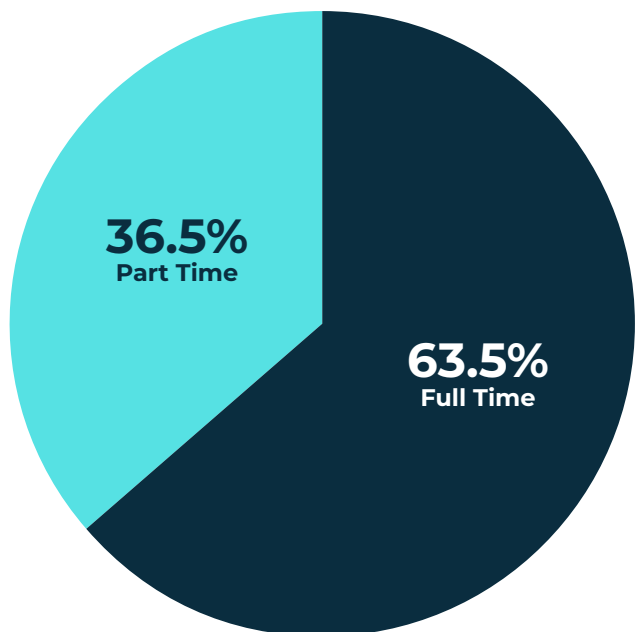
A 2019 study of transfer patterns in Michigan found that about 43% of all bachelor’s graduates were transfer students, 31% of whom transferred from community colleges (Taylor, 2019).¹ The significant number of students who earn a bachelor’s degree through transfer indicates that transfer pathways are a central vehicle for postsecondary pathways in Michigan.

Looking deeper, the study illuminated that transfer student behavior is highly variable in Michigan rather than always a timely, linear vertical transfer experience, illustrating the need for flexibility within the transfer ecosystem. Taylor also found interesting patterns of transfer student enrollment in particular academic programs, which are discussed further in [brief #6](#).

For this brief, OHE analyzed enrollment and mobility patterns across a sample² of 45,445 student records. Prior briefs in this series reviewed [descriptive detail about this sample](#) and [data on these transfer students’ success outcomes](#).

TRANSFER STUDENT ENROLLMENT PATTERNS

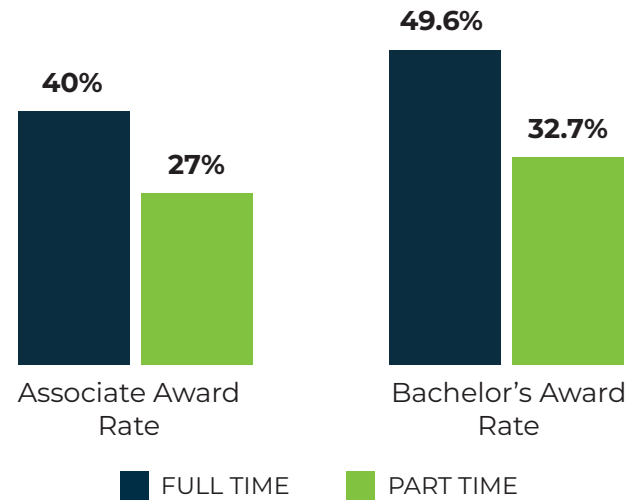
First, OHE considered part-time and full-time enrollment status. Students in the sample were identified as part or full time based on their first fall semester of enrollment. If they attempted 12 or more credits in that term, they were considered full time in this cohort. If they attempted fewer than 12 credits, they were considered part time. Overall, OHE found that just over 63% of the sample were enrolled full time with over 36% enrolled part time. This trend is especially compelling as compared with national statistics showing 30% of postsecondary students being full time where nearly 70% enroll part time.³



Full-Time Students Make Up More Than 63% of All Transfer Students

The difference between part-time and full-time students' bachelor's degree-earning rates in OHE's cohort is about 17 percentage points (49.6% full time, 32.6% for part time), indicating evidence that attending full time improves transfer student success rates.

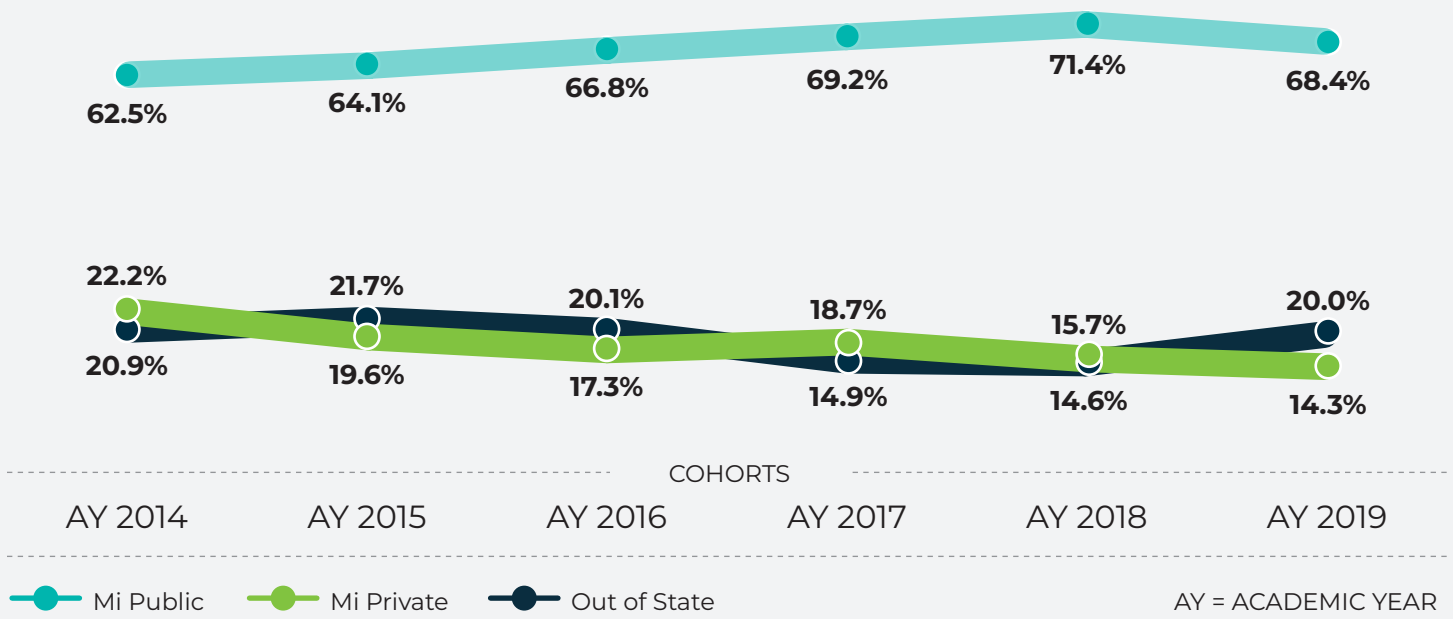
Full-Time Transfer Students Earn Degrees at Much Higher Rates Than Part-Time Students



TRANSFER MOBILITY PATTERNS

OHE analysis revealed that Michigan community college transfer students had been increasingly mobile to in-state public universities over other sectors in the last decade. However, the latest cohort in our dataset shows a post-COVID dip in transfer student mobility to both public and private MI-based institutions and a clear spike in mobility to out-of-state (including online) institutions as depicted below.

MICHIGAN TRANSFER STUDENT SECTOR MOBILITY PATTERNS

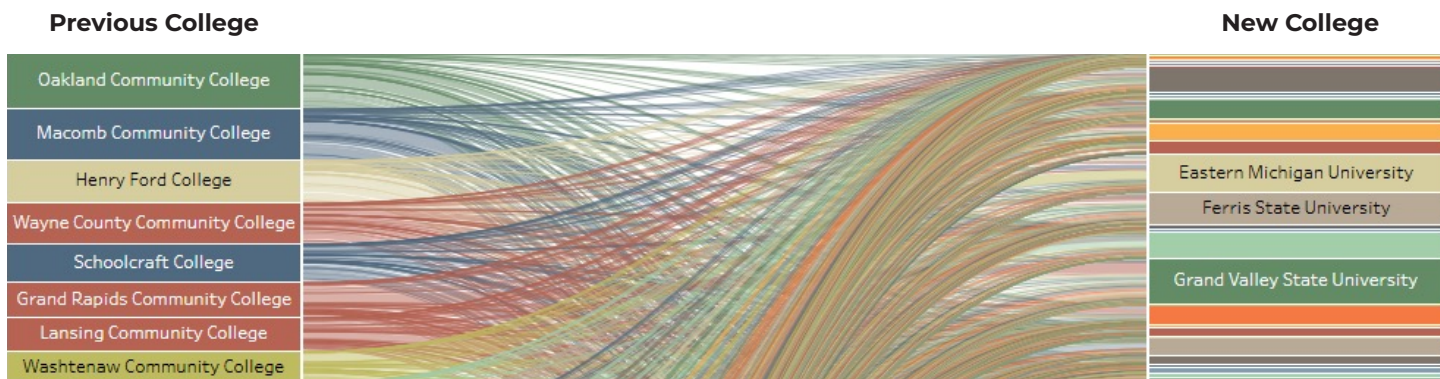


MICHIGAN COMMUNITY COLLEGE ASSOCIATION TRANSFER STUDENT MOBILITY DASHBOARD

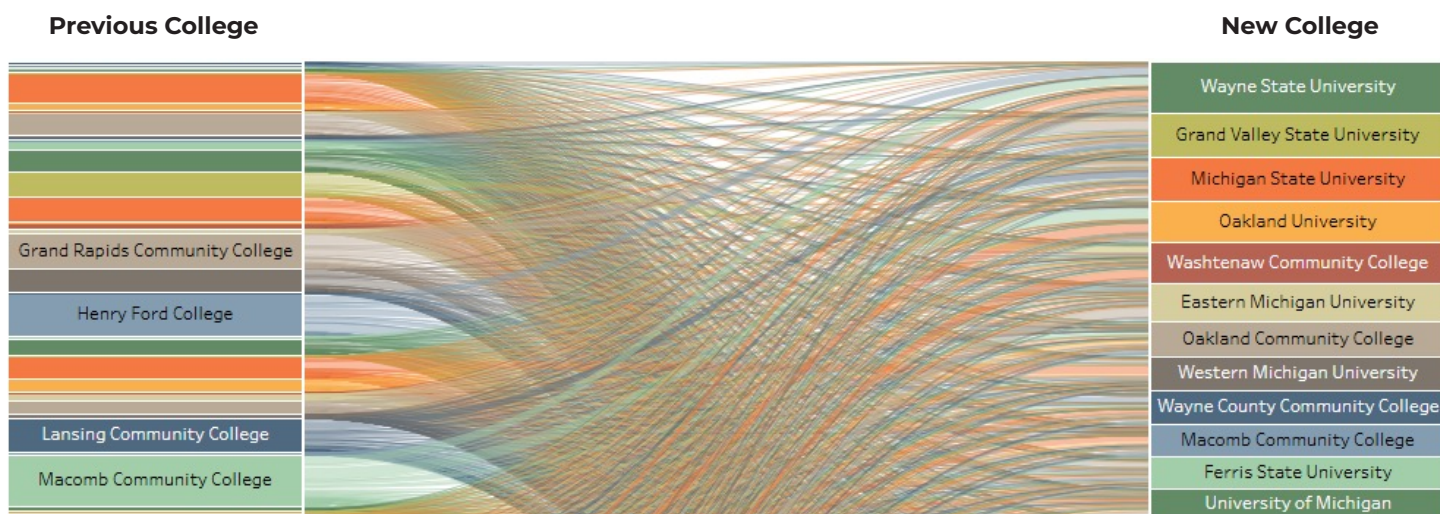
The Michigan Community College Association uses data from the [Center for Educational Performance and Information](#) to seed its “[Michigan College Transfer](#)” dashboard,⁴ which allows users to explore trends in transfer patterns across Michigan’s colleges and universities. OHE staff reviewed the cumulative data reported and found notable differences in transferring-to institution trends when manipulating school year selections post-COVID. At the time of writing, the data spanned AY 2015-2016 through AY 2023-2024.

Looking deeper at single institution patterns shows clear transfer partnerships between geo-located institutions, particularly those in more rural areas of the state. Zooming out, however, the bigger picture reveals that Michigan community college students transfer all over the state. The first figure below shows cumulative data on the top “sending” institutions from which students transfer, where the second figure shows the top “receiving” institutions to which students transfer.

WHERE STUDENTS TRANSFER FROM



WHERE STUDENTS TRANSFER TO



Looking through this statewide lens underscores the importance of smooth, consistent transfer pathways that work for Michigan students all across the state.

1. **Taylor, J. L. (2019):** [Postsecondary transfer and mobility in Michigan: Exploring transfer patterns, programs, places, and people.](#) Michigan Center for Student Success.
2. **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 their 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.
3. **U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (n.d.):** [IPEDS Trend Generator data table \[Data set\]](#). Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System.
4. **A Dashboard Inquiry Guide** offers helpful explanation of how to effectively use this tool.