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ABSTRACT

As part of a 5-year follow-up of students who transferred from Illinois 2-year colleges to Illinois senior institutions in fall 1979, a study was conducted to analyze the persistence and achievement rates of 10,016 students during their first year after transfer. The study revealed that: (1) the spring 1980 term was completed by 83% of the Associate in Arts/Associate in Science (AA/AS) students, 73% of the Associate in Applied Science (AAS) graduates, and 77% of the students without a degree; (2) the overall attrition rate after 1 year was 21%; (3) AA/AS degree students earned an average of 62.9 credits at the 2-year college and had an average of 61.4 credits accepted by the senior college, while for AAS students these figures were 68.6 and 56.0, respectively, and for students without a degree, the figures were 38.3 and 43.2, respectively, indicating that non-degreed students attended more than one institution before transferring; (4) AA/AS students earned slightly more credits than non-degreed students at the senior college, with AAS graduates earning the lowest average credits; (5) for all three groups, grade point averages (GPAs) declined in the first term after transfer and rose in the second term, though not to pre-transfer levels; and (7) a higher proportion of students with low grades appeared to discontinue enrollment. The study report compares findings with previous studies conducted in 1967 and 1974 and discusses the study's implications for 2-year college education in Illinois. (HB)

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FALL 1979 TRANSFER STUDY

Report 2

First Year Persistence and Achievement

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Report 2

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PREFACE

This study of students who transferred from Illinois two-year colleges to Illinois senior colleges and universities in Fall 1979 is the third in a series of follow-up studies of Illinois transfer students. Follow-up data on individual students are being submitted for the five-year duration of the study by 42 participating senior institutions. All public community colleges and four private junior colleges in Illinois submitted pre-transfer characteristics data on their students at the beginning of the study.

The first report, presenting mobility patterns and pre-transfer characteristics of the Fall 1979 transfer students, was published in February 1982. This second report analyzes the progress toward baccalaureate degree completion by the Fall 1979 transfer students during the first year after transfer, i.e., for Fiscal/Academic Year 1980. Additional annual reports and special topic reports will be published as data become available and analyses are completed.

The staff of the Illinois Community College Board and the members of the Transfer Study Subcommittee thank the study coordinators at the individual participating senior colleges for their continuing cooperation in this often arduous data-collection process.

Jan Kieffer Bragg
Associate Director for Research

Introduction

The 1979 Transfer Study Report 1: Mobility Patterns and Pre-transfer Characteristics revealed that the students identified and verified as transfers from Illinois two-year to senior colleges in the Fall 1979 had earned a pre-transfer grade point average (GPA) of 2.93 and that 39 percent had completed an associate degree before transferring, while 61 percent transferred without having completed a degree. This second report will analyze the persistence and achievement of these students during their first year after transfer, academic year 1979-80.

This first-year report and subsequent annual reports will compare the persistence and achievement of the 1979 transfer students by three pre-transfer degree statuses--Associate in Arts/Associate in Science (AA/AS) degree recipients, Associate in Applied Science (AAS) degree recipients, and non-degree completing transfer students. The assumption is that students who earned an AA or AS degree prior to transfer will have completed the lower-division baccalaureate requirements and will be classified as juniors at most Illinois senior institutions if they continue in the same program or "major." The students who transferred without completing an associate degree, especially the 38 percent who transferred with fewer than 30 credits, cannot be expected to complete baccalaureate degree requirements within two years after transfer and, indeed, may not have completed any general education requirements before entry in the senior institution. AAS degree recipients also may be unique. The AAS degree is generally considered a terminal or non-transfer degree. It is designed primarily to provide postsecondary entry-level vocational skills. In the pursuit of the AAS degree, however, some students change their educational goals and seek admission to baccalaureate degree programs. Since the course requirements for the AAS degree differ substantially from AA and AS degree requirements, the AAS degree transfer students cannot be assumed to have completed lower-division baccalaureate requirements even though they have completed an associate degree.

The number of AAS degree recipients in the 1979 transfer study is small--722 students or 7.2 percent of the total--while AA/AS degree recipients account for 31.5 percent of the total. The May 1980 Illinois Board of Higher Education Data Book indicates that 19,628 students received associate degrees from Illinois institutions in FY 1979: 9,417 AA and AS degrees and 10,211 AAS degrees. Since AAS degree recipients accounted for 52 percent of the FY 1979 associate degree recipients and only seven percent of the Fall 1979 transfer sample, these data confirm the impression that very few AAS degree recipients pursue baccalaureate degrees at this time.

After publication of the first report, both two-year colleges and senior colleges were asked to correct discrepancies in reported GPAs. As a result of this correction process, 43 students were removed from the study because they had not, in fact, earned credits at the identified sending two-year college, although they had been registered at one time. In addition, one senior college withdrew from the study, necessitating the removal of its students. The number of students included in this analysis of first-year persistence and achievement is, thus, 10,016.

Persistence

One of the purposes in conducting this study of Fall 1979 transfer students was "to determine the level of performance, persistence, and baccalaureate degree completion of these transfer students within a period of five years." Since only ten students completed baccalaureate degrees during the first year after transfer, persistence toward degree completion during academic year 1979-80 is more realistically measured by continuing enrollment and term completion. Subsequent reports will analyze baccalaureate degree completion rates.

Table 1 below compares the number of students beginning Fall Term 1979 to the number who completed Fall 1979 and the number who completed Spring 1980. Of those students who did not complete the first year after transfer, seven percent withdrew during the Fall 1979 Term, eight percent did not re-enroll for the Spring 1980 Term, and six percent withdrew during the Spring 1980 Term for an overall first-year attrition rate of 21 percent.

Table 1

FIRST YEAR AFTER TRANSFER PERSISTENCE BY PRE-TRANSFER DEGREE STATUS

Pre-transfer Degree Status	Entered Fall 1979	Completed Fall 1979		Completed Spring 1980*	
	Number	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
AA/AS Degree	3,150	2,951	94	2,612	83
AAS Degree	722	661	92	527	73
No Degree	6,144	5,671	92	4,739	77
Totals/Averages	10,016	9,283	93	7,878	79

*"Spring 1980" includes the second or spring semester of a college on a semester calendar, the third or spring quarter on a quarter calendar, and the second or winter/spring trimester of a trimester calendar.

As Table 1 indicates, the number of students persisting varies among the three pre-transfer degree categories, with students who completed an AA or AS degree before transfer being more likely to persist than students who transferred without an associate degree. AAS degree recipients had the highest attrition rate of the three groups. The retention of Fall 1979 transfer students compares favorably to the retention of Fall 1967 transfer students. The 1967 transfer study, although including a slightly different population (see Report 1), found that 66 percent of the students who transferred from private two-year colleges and 71 percent who transferred from public community colleges completed the first year after transfer.

Since persistence may be influenced by, or indeed, be a factor of, commitment to a particular field of study, Tables 2, 3, and 4 on the next three pages show the relationship between pre-transfer and post-transfer programs for students in each of the three pre-transfer degree categories.

Table 2

NUMBER OF AA/AS DEGREE TRANSFERS BY PRE- AND POST-TRANSFER PROGRAM
(IN AGGREGATED TWO-DIGIT HEGIS CODES)

POST-TRANSFER PROGRAM	PRE-TRANSFER PROGRAM	Undeclared/Unknown	Business	Education	General Liberal Arts	Science & Mathematics	Social & Behavioral Sciences	Engineering	Arts & Humanities	Health	Technologies	Other	TOTAL	%
Undeclared/Unknown		12	26	10	188	6	9	2	5	4	40	1	303	9.6
Business (05)		111	326	4	280	2	4	3	4	0	75	3	812	25.8
Education (08)		69	12	90	233	3	6	0	15	0	20	3	451	14.3
General Liberal Arts (49)		5	6	3	48	3	5	2	3	0	7	1	83	2.6
Science & Mathematics (04, 07, 17, 19)		52	14	7	138	25	1	5	0	10	16	1	269	8.5
Social & Behavioral Sciences (14, 20, 21, 22)		74	9	16	256	3	46	3	3	0	22	1	433	13.7
Engineering (09)		28	6	10	58	4	1	57	1	0	7	0	172	5.5
Arts & Humanities (10, 11, 15, 23)		41	4	15	124	1	4	0	41	0	5	5	240	7.6
Health (12)		18	3	9	63	6	0	1	0	10	19	0	129	4.1
Technologies (50-55)		2	0	0	9	0	0	1	0	0	2	0	14	0.4
Other (01, 02, 06, 13, 16)		47	9	7	126	5	0	0	8	1	12	29	244	7.7
TOTAL	N	459	415	171	1523	58	76	74	80	25	225	44	3150	99.8
	%	14.6	13.2	5.4	48.3	1.8	2.4	2.3	2.5	0.8	7.1	1.4	99.8	

Table 3

NUMBER OF AAS DEGREE TRANSFERS BY PRE- AND POST-TRANSFER PROGRAM
(IN AGGREGATED TWO-DIGIT HEGIS CODES)

POST-TRANSFER PROGRAM	PRE-TRANSFER PROGRAM	Undeclared (00)	Agric./Sci Tech (54)	Bus./Commerce Tech (50)	Data Processing Tech (51)	Engineering Tech (53)	Health Tech (52)	Public Service Tech (55)	General Lib. Arts (49)	Academic (01-48)	N TOTAL	%
Undeclared/Unknown		15	3	38	13	10	24	21	8	4	136	18.8
Agriculture (01)		9	17	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	28	3.9
Business (05)		25	0	64	8	5	6	3	7	8	126	17.5
Computer Science (07)		7	0	1	19	5	1	0	0	0	33	4.6
Engineering (09)		12	1	1	1	23	0	0	6	7	51	7.1
Health (12)		18	0	2	0	1	43	1	4	1	70	9.7
Education (08)		9	7	5	1	3	9	21	6	2	63	8.7
Home Economics (13)		3	2	5	0	1	2	3	0	0	16	2.2
Public Service (21)		12	0	0	0	1	2	52	2	2	71	9.8
Other HEGIS Codes		29	0	22	2	16	14	31	8	6	128	17.7
TOTAL	N	139	30	138	44	65	101	132	42	31	722	100.0
	%	19.3	4.2	19.1	6.1	9.0	14.0	18.3	5.8	4.3	100.1	

Table 4

 NUMBER OF NON-DEGREE TRANSFERS BY PRE- AND POST-TRANSFER PROGRAM
 (IN AGGREGATED TWO-DIGIT HEGIS CODES)

POST-TRANSFER PROGRAM	PRE-TRANSFER PROGRAM	Undeclared/Unknown	Business	Education	General Liberal Arts	Science & Mathematics	Social & Behavioral Sciences	Engineering	Arts & Humanities	Health	Technologies	Other	TOTAL	%
Undeclared/Unknown		195	59	14	507	12	11	10	15	6	215	2	1045	17.0
Business (05)		202	373	20	382	7	6	7	2	6	220	3	1228	20.0
Education (08)		143	18	108	249	3	4	0	12	4	91	4	636	10.4
General Liberal Arts (49)		77	32	4	171	4	5	3	5	3	52	2	359	5.8
Science & Mathematics (04, 07, 17, 19)		118	25	13	245	37	3	23	1	9	73	3	550	9.0
Social & Behavioral Sciences (14, 20, 21, 22)		180	32	22	329	2	32	2	2	1	101	5	708	11.5
Engineering (09)		76	5	8	115	5	1	86	2	3	51	1	353	5.7
Arts & Humanities (10, 11, 15, 23)		62	7	6	187	0	3	0	48	0	42	5	360	5.9
Health (12)		82	7	6	179	25	1	0	3	9	60	3	375	6.1
Technologies (50-55)		24	1	1	33	1	1	1	2	1	28	0	93	1.5
Other (01, 02, 06, 13, 16)		116	10	11	182	7	4	6	5	2	64	30	437	7.1
TOTAL	N	1275	569	213	2579	103	71	138	97	44	997	58	6144	100.0
	%	20.8	9.3	3.5	42.0	1.7	1.2	2.2	1.6	0.7	16.2	0.9	100.1	

The relationship between pre- and post-transfer programs appears strongest for AA/AS degree recipients, with 58 percent continuing in the same program when the pre-transfer "undeclared" and "general liberal arts" categories are omitted. The high number of students, 48 percent, whose pre-transfer program was general liberal arts is reflective of the number of community colleges who do not specify "majors" for their transfer associate degrees. The non-degreed transfer students show a pattern similar to, but not as strong as, the AA/AS degree recipients, with 33 percent (excluding "undeclared" and "general liberal arts"), continuing enrollment in the same program. When the "undeclared" and "general liberal arts" categories are omitted, 45 percent of the AAS degree recipients appear to transfer from technical programs (5000-5500 HEGIS) to related "professional" programs. Overall, less than half of the transfer students continued enrollment in the same program after transfer.

When students in all three pre-transfer degree categories are combined, 22 percent of the 1979 transfer students entered programs in business after transfer; 13 percent transferred into social and behavioral sciences, and 12 percent into education. These three program categories account for nearly half of all Fall 1979 transfer students. The post-transfer "undeclared/unknown" category, which accounts for 14.8 percent of the students, includes Fall term withdrawals, "true" undeclared majors, and students whose program HEGIS was erroneously reported.

Achievement

The first year after transfer achievement of the Fall 1979 transfer students was measured both by the number of credits earned and the term and cumulative GPA. Table 5 compares the mean number of credits earned prior to transfer, the mean number of prior credits accepted by the senior institutions, and the mean number of credits earned in Fall Term 1979 and Spring Term 1980 for students in each of the three pre-transfer degree categories. In reporting pre-transfer credits accepted, it must be understood that at time of transfer senior colleges accept prior credits earned as general credits to determine class standing. These credits may or may not fulfill the baccalaureate requirements in the student's selected curriculum or "major."

Table 5

MEAN NUMBER OF CREDITS EARNED BY PRE-TRANSFER DEGREE STATUS
(IN SEMESTER HOURS)

Degree Status	Pre-transfer Credits Earned at Two-year College	Pre-transfer Credits Accepted by Senior College	Fall 1979 Credits Earned	Spring 1980 Credits Earned
	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean
AA/AS Degree	62.9	61.4	12.0	12.7
AAS Degree	68.6	56.0	10.1	10.9
No Degree	38.3	43.2	11.4	11.8

As expected, AA/AS degree recipients were able to transfer nearly all of their pre-transfer credits to the senior colleges. On the average, AA/AS degree recipients earned 1.5 more pre-transfer credits than were accepted in transfer. They were, nonetheless, granted credit, on the average, for the full 60 semester credit hours generally required for AA/AS degree completion, as recommended in the Illinois Board of Higher Education General Education Compact of 1970. In addition, the AA/AS degree recipients earned slightly more credits in both the Fall and Spring terms after transfer than did the AAS and non-degreed transfers. Although AAS degree recipients, on the average, earned 12.6 more credits than were accepted in transfer, they were granted credit, on the average, for all but four credits of the 60 credits normally required for "junior" standing.

Non-degreed transfers, on the average, were granted more credit in transfer than they had earned at the identified sending two-year college. This suggests that the non-degreed transfers attended more than one institution before transferring in Fall 1979. ~~Indeed, nine percent (N=558)~~ were reported by the sending two-year colleges as having earned an average of 22 credit hours before enrolling in the two-year college. Even this, however, does not explain all of the 12.8 percent difference between pre-transfer credits earned and accepted. It is hypothesized that, unless students plan to complete a degree at the two-year college -- and non-degreed transfers apparently did not plan to do so since they transferred without completing a degree -- students may see no need to forward transcripts of previous college work to the two-year college, and, thus, the two-year college would not be aware that a student enrolling in a course or two is a transfer student rather than a first-time student.

Table 6 shows the frequency by categories of pre-transfer, Fall Term 1979, and Spring Term 1980 earned GPA for students in each of the three pre-transfer degree categories. Table 6 illustrates the decline in GPA the first term after transfer for all three groups of students. The Fall and Spring "No GPA" category includes the students who withdrew or did not re-enroll. The increase in that category and the decline in the percent of students in the "0.01-1.99" category in Spring Term 1980 suggests a relationship between dropping out and low grades. After an initial drop, the percentage of AA/AS degree recipients earning post-transfer GPAs of 3.00 or better increases from 42 to 43 percent, while the percentage of AAS and non-degreed transfers earning 3.00 or better continues to decline throughout the first year after transfer.

Table 7 shows the mean GPA (pre-transfer, Fall 1979, Spring 1980, and cumulative in Spring 1980) for students in each of the three pre-transfer degree statuses. AA/AS degree recipients had the highest pre-transfer GPA of the three groups and maintained the highest term and cumulative GPA throughout the first year after transfer. The mean GPA for students in each of the three groups declined the first term after transfer compared to the mean pre-transfer GPA. The mean Fall Term 1979 GPA of AA/AS degree recipients is 0.33 lower than their mean pre-transfer GPA. For AAS degree recipients, the drop from pre-transfer to end of Fall Term 1979 GPA is 0.36, and for non-degreed transfers the drop is 0.33. All three groups show an increase in mean Spring Term 1980 GPA: AA/AS degree recipients increase by 0.15 and AAS degree recipients and non-degreed transfers increase by 0.10.

Table 6

FREQUENCY OF GPAs (IN CATEGORIES)
BY PRE-TRANSFER DEGREE STATUS

Pre-transfer Degree Status	GPA Categories	Pre-transfer		Fall 1979		Spring 1980	
		Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
AA/AS Recipients	No GPA	0	0	218	7	538	17
	0.01-1.99	46	1	453	14	274	9
	2.00-2.49	496	16	560	18	462	15
	2.50-2.99	860	27	617	20	520	17
	3.00-3.49	1,027	33	750	24	730	23
	3.50-4.00	721	23	552	18	626	20
Total		3,150	100	3,150	101	3,150	101
AAS Recipients	No GPA	0	0	66	9	195	27
	0.01-1.99	10	1	114	16	66	9
	2.00-2.49	110	15	121	17	107	15
	2.50-2.99	213	30	128	18	92	13
	3.00-3.49	237	33	166	23	164	23
	3.50-4.00	152	21	127	18	98	14
Total		722	100	722	101	722	101
No Degree	No. GPA	0	0	557	9	1,405	23
	0.01-1.99	310	5	1,259	20	856	14
	2.00-2.49	1,419	23	1,257	20	1,032	17
	2.50-2.99	1,674	27	1,019	17	952	14
	3.00-3.49	1,617	26	1,193	19	1,099	18
	3.50-4.00	1,124	18	859	14	800	13
Total		6,144	99	6,144	99	6,144	99

NOTE: Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Table 7

MEAN GPA BY PRE-TRANSFER DEGREE STATUS

Pre-transfer Degree Status	Pre-transfer GPA		Fall 1979 GPA		Spring 1980 GPA		Spring 1980 Cumulative GPA	
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
AA/AS Degree	3.04	0.53	2.71	0.80	2.86	0.75	2.77	0.72
AAS Degree	3.03	0.51	2.67	0.84	2.77	0.77	2.70	0.73
No Degree	2.87	0.62	2.54	0.86	2.64	0.82	2.58	0.77

This movement in mean GPAs for Fall 1979 transfer students is consistent with the findings in both the Fall 1974 and Fall 1967 transfer studies. The Fall 1974 study found that the mean cumulative GPA at the end of the first year after transfer was 0.15 below the mean pre-transfer GPA, a drop from 2.80 to 2.65, but that the mean cumulative GPA at the end of the second year after transfer rose again to 2.80. Although the Fall 1967 study did not report pre-transfer GPA data, that study also reported an increase in mean GPA for the second semester compared to the first semester after transfer.

The initial drop and subsequent increase in mean GPA has two probable explanations. First, students earning lower grades may discontinue enrollment more frequently than those earning higher grades, as suggested in Table 6. Second, students may experience "transfer shock" their first term after transfer, but then adjust to the new situation by the second term. Both factors appear likely. Persistence data presented in the first section clearly reveals that a sizable minority of the Fall 1979 transfers withdrew, were dismissed, and/or failed to re-enroll during the course of the 1979-80 academic year. Whether earned or anticipated low grades precipitated withdrawal or failure to re-enroll is difficult to prove. Table 8, however, compares the pre-transfer and Fall 1979 mean GPAs of students who did and students who did not complete the Spring Term 1980. The difference in Fall Term 1979 GPA for completers and non-completers gives credence to the notion that a higher proportion of students with low grades discontinued enrollment. Because the pre-transfer GPA for the two groups is quite similar, the greater difference between the pre-transfer and Fall 1979 GPAs of non-completers (-0.52) compared to completers (-0.31) suggests that for some reason the non-completers as a group were more susceptible to "transfer shock."

Table 8

COMPARISON OF MEAN GPAs OF SPRING 1980 COMPLETERS AND NON-COMPLETERS

	Pre-transfer GPA		Fall 1979 GPA		Spring 1980 GPA
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean
Completers	2.96	0.58	2.65	0.81	2.72
Non-completers	2.83	0.62	2.31	0.95	--

Nearly all follow-up studies of transfer students conducted by individual states and nationwide show a decline in GPA the first term after transfer and an increase in subsequent terms. Because this study is built on individual, rather than college-aggregated data, it is possible to isolate for the first time that the increase in GPA in ensuing terms is not merely a result of the falling away of some students who earned lower grades. Future reports will continue to analyze this important finding.

Conclusions and Implications

The Fall 1979 transfer students persisted and achieved the first year after transfer as well as or better than the students in the 1967 and 1974 studies and in similar national studies. First year persistence and achievement of the 1979 transfer students varied by their pre-transfer degree status. Higher percentages of AA and AS degree recipients persisted through the first year, continued in the same field of study, and earned at least a "C" average after transfer than did AAS and non-degree transfer students. AAS degree recipients had the highest attrition rate, 27 percent, and earned the fewest credits after transfer of the three groups. Non-degree transfers, on the average, earned the lowest grades both before and after transfer.

This variation in level of success, though not a major problem, illustrates the continuing dilemma for two-year colleges: How responsible should the two-year colleges be for the success after transfer of students they have not certified as ready for transfer by granting an AA or AS degree? Through program admissions standards and graduation requirements, two-year colleges exert greater control over the preparation of students who have earned transfer degrees. They can mandate remediation, when necessary, and require general education courses and a minimum GPA for degree completion. The same control is not exercised over students who enroll in a course or two without enrolling in a transfer program. This study suggests a number of areas for individual college self-improvement in order to achieve an even better record. For example, despite their stated intent, all students should be viewed as potential transfer students. To assist this potential transfer population, two-year colleges should re-examine the availability of academic advising for students who have not declared an intent to transfer. Students enrolled in a course or two part-time or in the evening to explore areas of personal interest may, through the experience, decide to transfer to a baccalaureate program, and, thus, need information and guidance about course selection and transferability. Although the percentage of AAS degree recipients who transfer is low, counselors should be attuned to keeping the transfer option open as they assist AAS degree students in selecting courses. For example, AAS degree pursuers with the ability or an inclination toward transfer should be guided into "freshman composition" in lieu of "communications" in order to facilitate transfer should the student decide to do so.

Second, although AA and AS degree recipients as a group were more successful after transfer than students in the other two categories, a minority did not succeed: 14 percent earned less than a "C" average the first term after transfer, and 17 percent did not complete the first year. Those who did succeed experienced an average decline in GPA of 0.33 the first term after transfer. Assuming that a GPA of 2.00 is required for completion of an associate degree and also for admission to a senior institution, the colleges reported that 46 AA/AS degree recipients and 10 AAS degree recipients earned pre-transfer GPAs of less than 2.00, and yet all 56 were graduated from two-year colleges, and were admitted to senior institutions. These findings suggest that both two-year and senior colleges should re-examine their admissions and graduation requirements.

Finally, the decline in GPA from pre-transfer to Fall Term 1979 indicates that two-year colleges should examine their grading policies and practices to prevent grade inflation and their academic advising services and publications in order to minimize the "shock" that seems to occur for many students the first term after transfer. Senior institutions, too, should examine their orientation, advising, and counseling programs for transfer students to help them better adjust during the transition period. Since more than one-fifth of the students transfer into business, articulation may need greater scrutiny.

The two-year colleges in Illinois offer a variety of programs to meet a wide diversity of student needs and interests, ranging from the traditional first two years of baccalaureate work to occupational training to general studies and remedial courses. This study confirms that the vast majority of those students who complete an associate transfer degree and do transfer to a senior institution performs well the first year after transfer. Contrary to the impression created by individuals critical of the two-year college transfer mission, these findings indicate that transfer programs are successful and strong. Earning an Associate in Arts or Sciences degree at a two-year college first is a viable and worthwhile way to complete the first two years of a baccalaureate degree.