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AUTHOR Clagett, Craig A.  
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ABSTRACT

Determining "what percentage of community college students transfer" requires clarification of such questions as which students should be included in the calculation, how many hours should the student earn at the community college before transferring, and how long should the students be followed. At Prince George's Community College, transfer rates were calculated for 1984 entering students whose stated goal was to transfer, students who were enrolled in transfer degree programs, full- and part-time students, and program graduates. Study findings included the following: (1) 27% of PGCC's fall 1984 entrants had transferred to a senior institution by spring 1988; (2) of those who had earned at least 12 hours at PGCC, the transfer rate was 36%; (3) 65% of those students earning at least 12 hours at PGCC with transfer as their goal had transferred within 4 years of PGCC entry; (4) this rate increased to 73% for those who attended PGCC full time; (5) students who completed least 12 hours at PGCC, attended full time in a transfer curriculum, and had a transfer goal had a 74.3% transfer rate; (6) PGCC program graduates had a 59% transfer rate; and (7) nearly 77% of those who graduated from PGCC transfer programs and had transfer goals had transferred, compared to a statewide average of 82%. (GFW)

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ALTERNATIVE CALCULATIONS OF A COMMUNITY COLLEGE TRANSFER RATE.

RESEARCH BRIEF RB91-3.

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Craig A. Glagett

Prince George's Community College  
Office of Institutional Research and Analysis

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Office of Institutional Research and Analysis

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Introduction

Answering the question, "what percentage of community college students transfer?" is not as simple a request as it first appears. Deciding what community college students are to be included in the calculation is fundamental; with the diversity of students attending community colleges, half of whom probably have no intention of transferring, deciding who to count is the first question that needs to be answered. How many hours should a student earn at the community college before he or she can legitimately be counted as a "community college" transfer? Most four-year colleges and universities in Maryland only consider students transferring at least 12 hours from the community college as "transfer students." This fits the definition advocated by the Center for the Study of Community Colleges/Ford Foundation Transfer Assembly, which includes "all students entering in a given year who have no prior college experience, who complete at least 12 degree-credit units at the college, and who subsequently enroll at a senior institution." It is argued that students completing fewer than 12 hours have not been at the community college long enough to be meaningfully affected by the college.

So the baseline transfer rate will reflect new students who earn at least 12 hours at the community college and then transfer to a four-year school. The next question to be decided is the study period: how many years do we follow the students? The CSCC/FF recommendation is four years. Four years has also been the study period for several Maryland SBCC transfer and graduation analyses.

Refining the Definition

Given the wide variety of student reasons for attending community colleges, and their varying patterns of attendance, it makes sense to look at several subgroups of students:

Transfer goal. To be most meaningful, student outcomes assessment must take student goals into account. Maryland's community colleges now routinely collect student goal information at registration; a goal question was also included in the 1984 entrant survey. It is reasonable to ask what percentage of students who had a goal of transferring succeeded in doing so.

Transfer program. Degree programs at Maryland community colleges are designed for either transfer or occupational preparation. While the distinction does not preclude students in occupational programs from transferring, the logic of course requirements and sequencing does reflect the primary purpose of each curriculum. It is reasonable to ask what percentage of students enrolled in transfer programs succeeded in transferring.

Student courseload. Because studies such as this must be time bound, a student's attendance (full- or part-time) will have an impact on attainment rates. Full-time attendance may also indicate greater motivation, commitment, and seriousness of purpose. It is reasonable to ask what percentage of students enrolled full-time succeeded in transferring.

Graduates. While the majority of students who transfer have not completed their community college program, it is nevertheless appropriate to examine transfer outcomes of community college graduates, especially those from transfer programs. It is the graduates, after all, who have completed the prescribed program to prepare for transfer and have presumably benefitted the most from the community college experience. It is reasonable to ask what percentage of students graduating from the community college succeed in transferring.

In addition to calculating transfer rates for student subgroups defined by their reason for attending, the type of community college program they enrolled in, their full- or part-time attendance pattern, and their achievement of the Associate's degree, it is reasonable to look at rates for various combinations of these attributes. For example, what is the transfer rate for full-time students completing at least 12 hours at their community college who had a goal of transferring and were enrolled in a transfer program? While this may seem an "over-qualified" definition, is it really? It can be argued that looking only at those who intended to transfer, who pursued an appropriate curriculum, and who were committed to full-time study, is fully justified.

### Analyzing the Results

Twenty-seven percent of PGCC's fall 1984 entrants had transferred to a senior institution by spring 1988. Of those who had earned at least 12 hours at PGCC, the transfer rate was 36 percent--the same as the analogous statewide rate for all community colleges in Maryland.

Transfer rates were much higher for those students who had stated transfer as their goal in attending the community college. Sixty-five percent of those students earning at least 12 hours at PGCC and who had a transfer goal had transferred within four

years of PGCC entry. The rate for those in this group who were able to attend PGCC full-time was 73 percent. Nearly three-quarters (74.3 percent) of the students who completed at least 12 hours at PGCC, attended full-time in a transfer curriculum, and had a transfer goal, had transferred.

A majority (59 percent) of the 1984 entrants who had graduated from PGCC had transferred to a senior institution. Nearly 77 percent of those who graduated from PGCC transfer programs and had transfer goals had transferred. The comparable statewide figure was 82 percent.

### Summary

Answering the question, "what percentage of community college students transfer?" depends on several definitional decisions. In this study of 1984 entrants surveyed four years later, the answers ranged from a little over a quarter of all entrants to four out of five transfer program graduates who had transfer goals. (Transfer rates for PGCC and all Maryland community colleges for all of the subgroups studied are in an appended table.)

The transfer rates presented in this research brief were based on responses to a 1988 mail survey. Due to the poor response rate to the survey, 23 percent, a weighting procedure was employed to mitigate response bias (see OIRA report RB91-1). Until the proposed statewide student tracking system is implemented, survey data will remain a primary source of transfer information.

Craig A. Clagett  
Director  
Institutional Research and Analysis

TRANSFER RATES TO FOUR-YEAR COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES  
 Fall 1984 Entrants to Maryland Community Colleges  
 Transfer Status in Spring 1988

	<u>PGCC</u>	<u>State</u>
All first-time students	27.0 (623)	27.6 (3924)
All first-time entrants completing at least 12 hours at their initial community college	35.7 (281)	35.7 (2075)
First-time entrants completing 12 hours who had a goal of transferring	65.1 (127)	63.0 (875)
First-time entrants completing 12 hours who pursued a transfer curriculum	52.5 (127)	50.0 (1073)
First-time entrants completing 12 hours who attended primarily full-time	45.6 (170)	44.1 (1212)
First-time entrants completing 12 hours, attending full-time, with transfer goal	72.9 (93)	69.3 (606)
First-time entrants completing 12 hours, attending full-time in transfer program	60.0 (86)	59.6 (654)
First-time entrants completing 12 hours, attending full-time in transfer program, with a goal of transferring	74.3 (66)	72.4 (462)
First-time entrants who graduated from the community college	59.0 (51)	51.6 (376)
First-time entrants who graduated from the community college and had transfer goal	78.9 (29)	79.4 (179)
First-time entrants who graduated from a community college transfer program	72.7 (22)	70.8 (184)
First-time entrants who graduated from a transfer program and had transfer goal	76.9 (18)	81.9 (135)

SOURCE: MCCR/SBCC survey of fall 1984 entrants conducted in spring 1988. Transfer rates are based on weighted responses as indicated; see OIRA report RB91-1 for methodological details.

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