

**REVIEW OF THE *COMPREHENSIVE ARTICULATION AGREEMENT* THAT EXISTS BETWEEN
CONSTITUENT INSTITUTIONS OF
THE NORTH CAROLINA COMMUNITY COLLEGE SYSTEM
AND CONSTITUENT INSTITUTIONS OF
THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA SYSTEM**

A Report to

The Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee,
The Senate Appropriations Committee on Education/Higher Education, and
The House Appropriations Subcommittee on Education

Submitted by

The State Board of Community Colleges and
The Board of Governors of the University of North Carolina

November 1, 2021

As Required by

Session Law 2013-72 (HB 903)

**ANNUAL REPORT ON THE *COMPREHENSIVE ARTICULATION AGREEMENT* TO
THE JOINT LEGISLATIVE EDUCATION OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE**

NOVEMBER 1, 2021

S.L. 2013-72 (HB 903) North Carolina General Statute 116-11(10c) requires the University of North Carolina System and the North Carolina Community College System to conduct biannual joint reviews of the *Comprehensive Articulation Agreement* to ensure that the agreement is fair, current, and relevant for all students and institutions and to report their findings to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee, including all revisions to the *Comprehensive Articulation Agreement* and reports of noncompliance by November 1 of each year. The statute also requires the University of North Carolina System and the North Carolina Community College System jointly develop an articulation agreement advising tool for students, parents, and faculty to simplify the course transfer and admissions process.

SUMMARY

The revised *Comprehensive Articulation Agreement* (CAA) was signed by the UNC Board of Governors and the State Board of Community Colleges on February 21, 2014. The CAA was implemented in the fall 2014 semester. To date, the Transfer Advisory Committee (TAC) has completed two full rounds of compliance visits and is just beginning their third round. There have yet to be any reports of noncompliance by any institution.

The University of North Carolina (UNC) System and the North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS) continue to work to enhance educational opportunities for NCCCS students by improving transfer administration, utilizing data to assess transfer effectiveness, and facilitating communication between respective constituent institutions. The UNC Transfer Student website, the College Foundation of North Carolina, and published baccalaureate degree plans (BDPs) from each university provide access to details that students need to make informed choices when selecting institutions, degree programs, and courses. Online data dashboards containing transfer information for each community college and university, as well as aggregate information for the two systems, improves transparency and accountability through public access to transfer and performance data. Both systems of public higher education in the state of North Carolina continue to work together to develop and support degree-mapping tools to facilitate informed and efficient transfer.

This report summarizes ongoing efforts to implement and fulfill the CAA. The TAC is committed to providing students and institutions with information and strategies to support both associate degree and baccalaureate degree completion.

The most recent version of the 2014 CAA, complete with appendices, is available at https://myapps.northcarolina.edu/transfertoolbox/download/5/caa/619/caa_2020-tac-approved-08-28-20.pdf

CAA PROGRESS - 2021

Transfer Enrollment and Performance Data

The UNC System data dashboard provides essential data on transfer students to include enrollment trends, credit hours and degree transfers, graduation rates, grade point average, and performance in disciplines after transfer. Within the dashboard, data for individual community colleges and universities are available for deeper analysis. The UNC System data dashboard continues to be a vital resource in determining whether the 2014 CAA is having the desired impact on transfer student success and whether the changes in policy and practice put in place because of the CAA and the associated compliance site visits are achieving the desired positive outcomes. This information is critical to the decision-making process for both individual community colleges and universities, as well as for the two systems. Students who entered the NCCCS in fall 2014 and later are under the protections of the 2014 CAA, and a significant number continue to transfer to the UNC System as of fall 2020. This large number of transfer students who possess the protections of the 2014 CAA and their successful transfer to the state universities give a clear indication of the value of the 2014 CAA to students.

Transfer Student Enrollment

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a steady increase in the enrollment of NCCCS transfer students into UNC System institutions. This increase is a clear result of the revised CAA, proper advising, and the strong collaboration between the UNC System and NCCCS. Data from fall 2019 and fall 2020 indicate slight decreases in associate degree completion among transfer students and in overall transfer enrollment. Since the majority of community college students do not complete their associate degrees in two years, the TAC anticipates an increasing trend in associate degree completion prior to transfer and in overall transfer enrollment as students, advisors, and institutions continue to gain a better understanding of the protections of the CAA and the wide-ranging benefits of degree completion.

Data illustrate a slight decrease in the number of NCCCS students transferring to the UNC System, down from 10,765 in fall 2019 to 10,409 in fall 2020. This represents a decrease of 356 students. Considering the impact that COVID-19 continues to have on higher education overall, a small decrease of 3.3% is understandable and not overly concerning (see Table 1; note that the overall trend since the update of the 2014 CAA has been markedly positive).

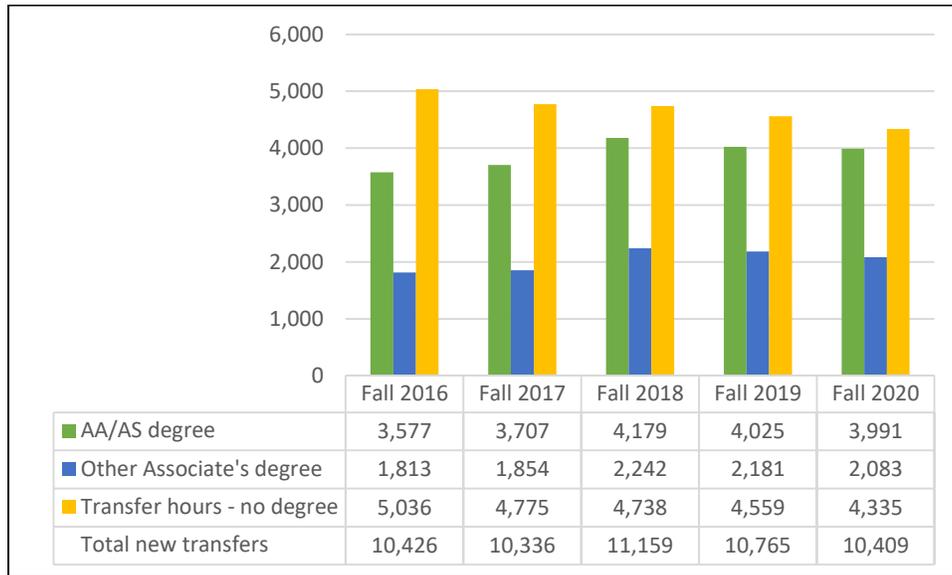
The number of NCCCS students transferring with a completed associate degree also dropped slightly (see Table 2) during the past year. In fall 2019, the total number of NCCCS students transferring with a completed degree (AA/AS or any other associate degree) was 6,206 compared to 6,074 students in fall 2020. This change represents a decrease of 132 students or 2.1% (see Table 2).

While the overall numbers of students transferring with completed degrees have increased since 2014, the number of NCCCS students who transfer to UNC System institutions with transfer credits but no degree has declined since the implementation of the revised CAA. In fall 2016, 5,036 NCCCS students transferred before completing an associate degree compared to 4,335 non-degree-earning students in fall 2020 (see Table 1). From fall 2016 to fall 2020, this number has decreased every year, and the overall decrease in the number of students transferring with credits but without a degree over this period totals 701 students or 13.9%. This decrease supports the sustained emphasis on degree completion at the community college level prior to transfer to a senior institution. The increase in overall transfer numbers

and the increase in degree completers prior to transfer illustrate the continued positive impact of the 2014 CAA on transfer student success in North Carolina.

Table 1

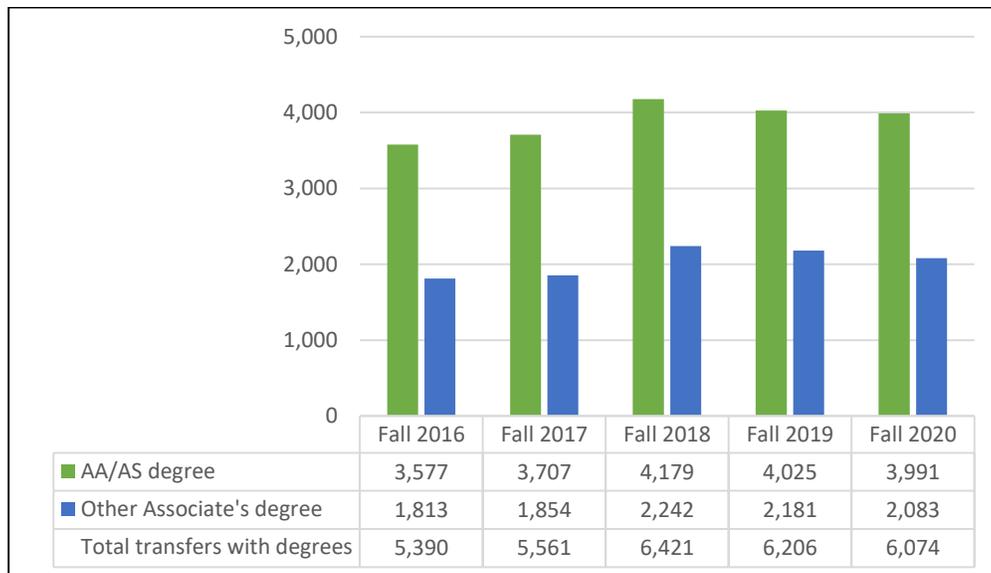
New NCCCS Student Enrollment in UNC System Institutions



Note: Data within Table 1 include the most current information posted on the UNC public dashboards and may differ slightly from previously reported information.

Table 2

NCCCS Student Transfers with Completed Associate Degree



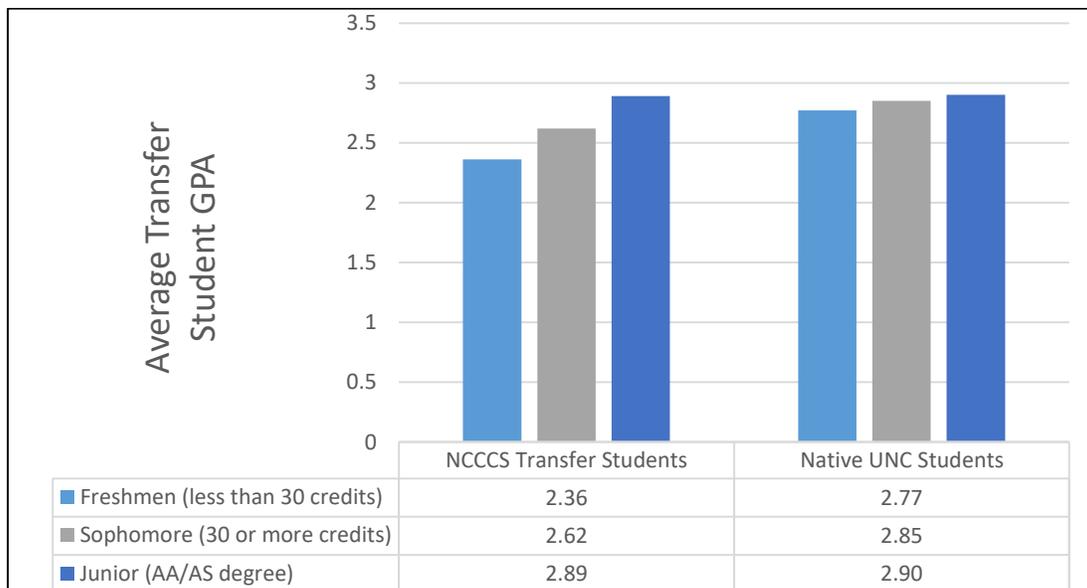
Note: Data within Table 1 include the most current information posted on the UNC public dashboards and may differ slightly from previously reported information.

Transfer Performance Data

The most recent data on transfer student performance (2020-2021 data for students who transferred in fall 2019) continue to indicate a strong correlation between degree and credit-hour completion prior to transfer and academic performance at the university (see Table 3). With regard to first-year performance, students who transfer from an NCCCS institution into a UNC System institution with fewer than 30 completed credit hours significantly lag behind those who started at a university as freshmen. This is also true of students who transfer before completing an associate degree but have more than 30 credit hours of transferable coursework: The overall first-year student GPA of non-degree-earning transfer students with more than 30 completed hours is lower compared to their native UNC System sophomore counterparts. Students who complete the associate degree prior to transfer and matriculate as juniors, however, perform comparably with native UNC System juniors. These results confirm the foundational principle of the CAA that transfer students who complete the associate degree prior to transfer will perform as well as students who began their higher education journeys at UNC System institutions.

Table 3

2020-21 Transfer Student Performance Grade Point Average After First Year



Note: Data indicated are reflective of first-year performance at UNC institutions for transfer students. This measurement was taken during fall 2020 to spring 2021 for the cohort entering in fall 2019.

Campus Compliance Site Visits

In January 2016, the Transfer Advisory Committee (TAC) established a process for reviewing the institutional transfer credit policies and procedures of UNC System institutions once every two years to ensure compliance with the CAA. (The North Carolina School of the Arts is not included in the compliance visits because it has very few transfer students). The TAC completed its first round of reviews for the 15 UNC System institutions in November 2017 (see Table 4). The second round of reviews began in October 2018 and was completed in November 2019. The third round of reviews began in March 2020 and is projected to be completed in fall 2021. To date, each institution has been found in compliance with the CAA after each site visit review of its policies.

Table 4

Dates of TAC Site Visits to each UNC System Institution

Institution	First-round Visit	Second-round Visit	Third-round Visit
Appalachian State University	07/25/2016	10/18/2018	04/24/2020
East Carolina University	09/15/2016	10/11/2018	10/30/2020
Elizabeth City State University	09/16/2016	10/12/2018	10/29/2020
Fayetteville State University	10/18/2017	10/29/2019	Fall 2021 TBD
North Carolina A&T University	03/29/2017	04/30/2019	05/04/2021
North Carolina Central University	11/17/2016	11/28/2018	05/27/2021
North Carolina State University	11/16/2016	11/07/2018	04/26/2021
UNC Asheville	04/17/2017	04/17/2019	06/09/2021
UNC-Chapel Hill	04/05/2017	05/01/2019	04/27/2021
UNC Charlotte	04/13/2016	10/16/2018	04/08/2020
UNC Greensboro	04/14/2016	10/18/2018	03/10/2020
UNC Pembroke	10/18/2017	10/28/2019	Fall 2021 TBD
UNC Wilmington	10/20/2017	10/17/2019	Fall 2021 TBD
Western Carolina University	04/19/2017	03/28/2019	04/19/2021
Winston-Salem State University	06/23/2016	11/16/2018	05/27/2020

TAC/CAA Campus Site Visit Process and Compliance Feedback Reports

The UNC System sends a CAA Review Form to each of the universities at least one month prior to the scheduled site visit. The TAC continued to refine this form in the past year to make it more useful to the institution under review and to the TAC site visit team. Accompanying this form, the UNC System Office provides data concerning transfer statistics and asks the university to reflect on their observations from these data on the CAA Review Form. A site visit team consisting of one TAC representative from the NCCCS and one from the UNC System reviews the forms along with other information from the Data Dashboard and the institution's website to assess transfer student admissions and performance data, completion rates, transfer credits accepted, total credits accumulated upon baccalaureate degree completion, most popular transfer student majors, top feeder community colleges, currency of baccalaureate degree plans (BDPs), and institutional practices. The TAC site visit team then interviews key transfer personnel at the UNC System institution and meets with NCCCS transfer students to hear about their transition experience.

Upon completion of the compliance visit, the site visit team submits feedback reports to the entire TAC for review and approval. The UNC System Office then sends the approved reports to each university provost for distribution to appropriate university personnel. To date, all UNC System institutions have been found to be in compliance with the provisions and guidelines of the CAA. TAC members continue to observe a growing familiarity with the tenets and provisions of the CAA now that the third round of site visits have begun. Furthermore, many UNC System institutions have implemented additional practices to form stronger partnerships with their community college neighbors. For example, several UNC System institutions have developed co-admission or provisional admission programs that allow university advisors the opportunity to work more closely with prospective transfer students. Additionally, several community colleges are offering dedicated space on their campuses for UNC System institution advisors to visit and work with students to be sure they are on a seamless path to transfer.

COVID-19 Impacts on Site Visits

As with so many other institutions and processes, the work of the TAC was disrupted, but not impeded, by the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic. All 2020 site visits and those during spring 2021 were scheduled in a virtual setting, and it is likely that fall 2021 site visits will be scheduled in that same manner as well. The main difference between these virtual visits and the traditional in-person visits has been the reduction in time spent with university representatives and the lack of student interaction. Fortunately, as university personnel are becoming more familiar with the CAA, the time required to address concerns and to hear of successes is not as great as in the initial rounds of visits. However, the lack of interaction with NCCCS transfer students is not ideal, and concerted efforts to meet with these students will be undertaken with site visits scheduled for fall 2021.

Community College Transfer Survey

As three cycles of site visits are nearing a close, even though it is not mandated by CAA legislation, the TAC feels it would be beneficial to get a community college perspective on the transfer process, as well. To that end, since it is not feasible to conduct 58 individual site visits, members of the TAC have worked to develop and pilot a survey that could be administered to the community colleges on a regular basis to gather feedback on how well the transfer process is working. The survey is still in the development and

review stages, but it is nearing readiness for deployment across the NCCCS. This survey will provide additional insight on strengths and weaknesses within the transfer partnership between the two systems and can suggest areas to be strengthened through additional guidelines.

Transfer Credit Appeal Procedure

Students who believe the terms of the CAA have not been adhered to by universities to which they are admitted may appeal by following the Transfer Credit Appeal provision in Appendix E of the CAA. Student awareness and use of the appeal process remain quite limited though, with no formal appeals having been filed to date. When faculty and staff advisors at NCCCS institutions have conveyed concerns about CAA adherence to the TAC, the issues have been resolved through conversations between TAC members and UNC System Office personnel. This process has worked well for situations of which college and university personnel have been made aware and given the opportunity to make satisfactory resolutions or explanations; however, there may be other undocumented cases whereby students are being deprived of the guarantees of the CAA but are also unaware of their options for recourse. Thus, the TAC is examining ways to encourage the appeals process, thereby creating a history of documented issues and their eventual resolutions. This would create greater transparency in the appeals process, strongly advocate for transfer student rights, and provide a record of issues and associated resolutions should those issues arise again in the future at a different institution. The TAC continues to promote greater awareness of the Transfer Credit Appeal provision among transfer students by recommending it be a required topic in the ACA 122 – College Transfer Success courses taken at NCCCS institutions.

Baccalaureate Degree Plans

The 2014 CAA requires UNC System institutions to develop and maintain baccalaureate degree plans (BDPs) to outline community college and university courses that lead to timely baccalaureate degree completion for each major plan of study that the university offers. While there remain varied approaches for maintaining these BDPs, more institutions are centralizing the responsibility for BDP maintenance in hopes of creating consistent and accurate BDPs while also being able to respond to course and program updates in a timely manner. The TAC continues to share best practices for BDP maintenance with UNC System institutions during site visits and is hopeful to develop a BDP template that would be acceptable to all universities and friendly to student use. It may also be beneficial to consider adopting BDPs for other types of degrees that are not part of the CAA (e.g., Associate in Fine Arts, Associate in Applied Science, Associate in Engineering, etc.).

CAA Revisions

This year, four new courses were added to the Pre-major/Elective course list. These courses were CJC 113 – Juvenile Justice, CJC 212 – Ethics & Community Relations, CSC 249 – Data Structures & Algorithms, and CSC 251 – Advanced JAVA Programming. These additions to the CAA were presented to appropriate personnel in both systems, with the expectation that BDPs will continue to be updated to reflect these changes in the next academic term.

UNC System Common Numbering System

The UNC System has undertaken the creation of a common numbering system for lower division courses which should further alleviate transfer issues between the two systems of higher education. While not

directly tied to the work of the TAC, the efforts on these fronts have involved various TAC members, and they are kept abreast of the progress from UNC System representatives.

Data Improvements and Equity

At the request of TAC, the UNC System Data and Analytics team has been able to provide more detailed information on their data dashboard. Specifically, they have been able to break out the category previously labeled as “other associate degrees” into more specific degrees (e.g., Associate in Fine Arts, Associate in Applied Science, Associate in Engineering, etc.). The TAC will soon formally ask for a further disaggregation of data by demographic variables such as racial/ethnic group identity and socioeconomic status. This will help the TAC identify any inequities in the transfer process. Knowledge of the differences in the experience of the transfer process will help facilitate important equity-related conversations at future TAC site visits.

Data Sharing Between the NCCCS and the UNC System

Furthermore, the TAC has approached both system offices regarding the possibility of implementing seamless data sharing between the two systems. This technology solution could interact with student records in both systems and assign university credit automatically without the need for regular human interaction and manual evaluation of transcripts. Such a system may require a substantial initial investment, but it would position colleges to repurpose personnel from data-processing to coaching transfer students, would facilitate curriculum alignment, and would maximize the common numbering systems soon to be present within both systems.

UNC System Director of Community College Partnerships

The UNC System has experienced regular turnover in their Director of Community College Partnerships position (established in 2017) but has recently filled the role by Dr. Eric Fotheringham. He has been able to revive many of the services that had been vacated by his predecessor and has proven a great addition to the TAC team. The TAC is pleased to be able to partner with Dr. Fotheringham in this role, as he has been a great transfer ally.

Academic Alignment and Appeal Procedures

The TAC has realized that regular improvement and revision to the existing CAA is necessary to ensuring the document remains relevant and continues to serve the needs of all stakeholders involved. Thus, the TAC will be adding a new appendix to the CAA that will outline just how such revisions will occur and be implemented. The TAC will also update the processes for appeals to perceived violations under the CAA and for additions to the transfer course lists. Furthermore, the TAC will partner with both system offices to send out regular communication to all transfer-related personnel at each public institution of higher education in North Carolina. These communiques will be sent in the form of numbered memos and relay important changes in policy, procedure, and interpretation.

Funding for TAC

Since its inception, the TAC has relied upon the home institutions of its members to fund member participation in TAC meetings, compliance site visits, and presentations at professional conferences or workshops. The TAC is intentionally comprised of members from across the state from both urban and rural areas and representing both large and small institutions. Unfortunately, the travel costs associated

with the duties and responsibilities of membership place an additional financial obligation on institutions that have already existing significant constraints and limitations on their spending. The NCCCS and the UNC System Offices both strongly advise that funding be allocated to provide for travel to TAC meetings, site visits, and professional presentations – all of which support the mission of increased transfer efficiency and effectiveness – for each of the members of the TAC. While virtual site visits and meetings were held during the height of the pandemic, face-to-face visits and meetings have proven to be more effective in coaching effective strategies, collaborating across systems, dialoguing with transfer students, and establishing rapport among multiple transfer-related stakeholders.

Conclusion and TAC Recommendations

In the past seven years, NCCCS and UNC System institutions have made steady progress toward seamless transfer. They continue to perfect and improve their partnerships to provide more effective advising, clear and consistent communication, and ongoing support to transfer students. As awareness and execution of the 2014 *Comprehensive Articulation Agreement* increase in North Carolina, more students are completing associate degrees at community colleges and transferring to UNC System institutions. Upon transfer, these degree-completers are performing comparably with students who started as freshmen at those same universities. The data provided in this report demonstrate that UNC System institutions are not only meeting the expectations set out in the CAA, but they are finding creative ways to enhance the transfer process and to champion transfer student success. In light of this positive momentum, the TAC continues to promote ongoing support of the following efforts:

- Technological and operational solutions that create greater continuity, clarity, accessibility, and transparency for advising and the processing of transfer students and informing course, program, and institution selection among the NCCCS and UNC System institutions, particularly through the implementation of statewide data sharing between the two systems;
- The addition of demographic data to the current transfer data dashboard on the UNC System page so that any inequities can be identified and addressed;
- An examination of policies and procedures as they relate to issues involving diversity, equity, and inclusivity among NCCCS and UNC System transfer students, with the objective of promoting equitable outcomes to ameliorate any deficiencies;
- Implementing templates for baccalaureate degree plans that would be recognizable and easy-to-follow for all students, no matter the eventual transfer destination; and
- Continuing collaborations with other key partners (e.g., NCSU’s Belk Center for Community College Leadership and Research, myFutureNC, North Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities, etc.) in the work of transfer success.