

CHANCELLOR'S MESSAGE

FROM JAY A. PERMAN



Strengthening the Transfer Pipeline

At the University System of Maryland, we're proud that our students come from so many different backgrounds and experiences, and take so many different paths into our universities. One path that's more common than some realize is through another college altogether. Last year, among our enrolled students were nearly 36,000 who had transferred into the USM. More than one-quarter of them came from a Maryland community college.

It's easy to see why this pathway is particularly rich. We're fortunate in Maryland to have a strong network of community colleges and a history of close collaboration between the state's two- and four-year institutions. We're also fortunate to have elected leaders who value higher ed, who are committed to ensuring that all students can access it, and who understand that improving access means improving affordability.

To that end, the Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC) offers a transfer scholarship to help two-year students make the transition into a four-year college. The USM is similarly committed to affordability. Last year, universities across the System gave two-year transfer students more than \$12 million in aid. And with a brand-new USM endowment providing additional money to students with financial need, that figure promises to grow.

Nearly 30% of USM undergrads—35,700—are transfer students. More than one-quarter of them came from a Maryland community college.



Frictionless Transfer

But money isn't the only barrier to transfer. The process, too, can derail some students. Nationally, a lot of attention has been paid to the challenges students face when transferring—challenges that can compound when a student attends several different colleges.

That's why it's important that students who want to transfer work with advisors to understand exactly how the courses they plan to take will "count" at the four-year college they've set their sights on. Which courses are equivalent to ones they'll need for their degree? Is one course the same as another with a slightly different name? What are the requirements for a certain major, and how can students be sure they've met them? This information has to be accessible not only to transferring students, but to the community college advisors they'll be working with.

An unwieldy transfer process can cost students time, money, credits—and a lot of frustration. So if our goal is to grow the number of community college students transferring into the USM—and it is—then we have to improve this process, make it as smooth as possible.

This is challenging work: The System enrolls thousands of transfer students each year, often carrying dozens of credits apiece, sometimes across several colleges. But it's work we're committed to, and it's work that's underway.



Articulating the Pathway

Articulation agreements between our universities and community colleges have long been used to guarantee students a seamless transfer into the System. We have hundreds of these agreements in place, and regulations produced by Maryland's Transfer With Success Act require that all new undergraduate programs carry at least one such agreement.

Take the Associate of Arts in Teaching: It's a nearly 20-year-old statewide articulation pathway for teacher preparation. Students who complete an AAT at a community college transfer their credits—in a block—to any four-year education program in Maryland to which they're accepted, where they finish the last two years of a bachelor's degree.

These agreements are especially useful for students who know what they want to study and can follow a clear path to get there. But students don't always stick to their major—*often* don't—and they, too, need a clear understanding of their transfer options.

For almost 30 years, the USM has managed ARTSYS, the state's online articulation platform. ARTSYS identifies course equivalencies, so students know which courses offered at their two-year college will transfer to their next institution; it recommends courses for specific majors; it allows students to upload their course history to determine how that history will be applied at the college they plan to attend.



Two-Year Transfers: A Profile

These efforts to illuminate the transfer process are paying off. While the pandemic has taken a toll on community college enrollment and, therefore, on our transfer numbers, we've nonetheless welcomed at least 9,000 two-year transfer students in each of the last five years. And they do slightly *better* in terms of degree completion than full-time, non-transfer students.

Two-year students transfer into every one of our universities. And our regional higher education centers cater specifically to these students, serving hundreds each year who are able to earn a four-year degree in their own community, where they can live, work, and care for their families without sacrificing their education. Our transfer students are older than "traditional" students, with an average age of 26, and they're racially diverse: Last year's two-year transfer class was 29 percent Black, 12 percent Hispanic, and 10 percent Asian.

The successes we've seen are a credit to one thing above all others: The state's entire higher ed community is invested in making this work. All of us—the USM, Maryland's independent colleges and universities, our 16 community colleges, MHEC, the General Assembly—are working together to make the transfer experience rewarding, and to put these students on a sure and clear path to a four-year degree. Two things have the potential to advance this work.

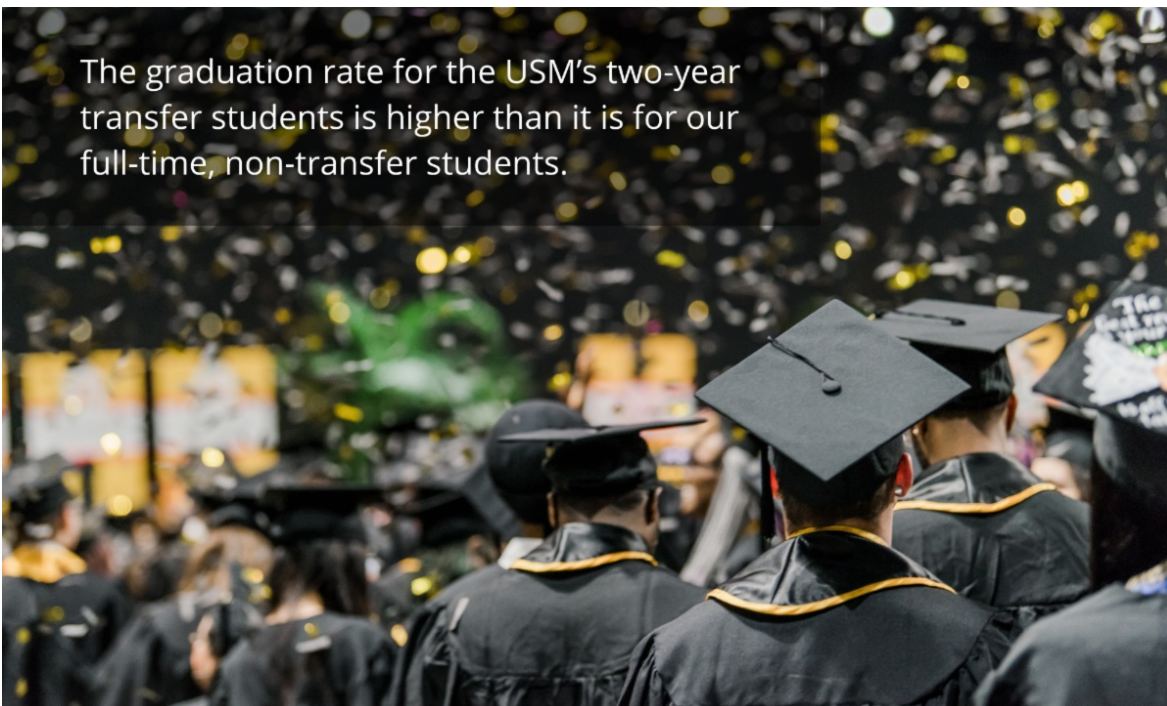


More than half of our two-year transfers are students of color, so improving the transfer process is essential to sustaining USM equity and diversity.

Transfer With Success

In 2021, the legislature passed the Transfer With Success Act. The bill generated regulations that will require significant changes to the data systems at public colleges and universities—changes that will yield better data on transfer metrics and, when a transfer of credit is denied, a clear explanation (to the student *and* to their college) on the reason for the denial.

As implementation moves forward, the USM has convened hundreds of public two-year and four-year faculty in a dozen disciplines to examine their course curricula, to improve the way their courses align with one another's, and to update course equivalencies—the list of courses at one college that will satisfy a requirement at another.



The graduation rate for the USM's two-year transfer students is higher than it is for our full-time, non-transfer students.

ARTSYS 2.0

Meanwhile, we're improving the platform that will help students navigate credit transfer. With a leading higher ed technology company, the USM is revamping ARTSYS. Like the original ARTSYS, this new platform brings together nearly three dozen Maryland colleges and universities—public universities, independent colleges, community colleges—each with its full catalogue of credit-bearing courses loaded onto the platform.

It allows students to choose the college they want to transfer to and the program they want to major in, and see which of their courses will transfer, *how* they'll transfer (e.g., as a general education course; a requirement for their major; an elective), and which courses they may still need to take. Saving these searches lets students compare their paths at different colleges. Of course, this requires a complete portfolio of course equivalencies—hundreds of thousands of them—and updating these is the next phase of work.

Ultimately, ARTSYS will include information on course sequences and recommended pathways that guarantee a seamless transfer. And as the platform smooths the process for students, it will help their colleges identify and address information gaps that now impede it.



The Future Student

As colleges adapt to a radically new landscape—who our students are and how they learn—we know that the future of transfer is the future of higher education. After all, more students age 25+ are in higher ed than ever before, and many of them have credits at more than one college.

The System's own strategic plan sets a goal that 25 percent of new USM students each year will have transferred from an in-state community college. Plus, the Blueprint for Maryland's Future expands dual enrollment, meaning significantly more *high school* students will enroll at our universities with some college credits already earned. With clear rules, defined agreements, and intentional advising aligned with student needs, we can smooth all of these paths into our universities.



Our goal isn't simply to get more community college students into the USM. It's to help them stay, succeed, and graduate.

Of course, given the complexity of improving student transfer, you could forget that it's only one part of our work. Our intention isn't simply to get more transfer students into the USM; it's to help them stay here, help them graduate. And that depends on a robust program of retention, completion, and success strategies targeted explicitly to our transfer population.

None of this is easy. But it is essential. Because the System's success depends on the success of our students—all of them on their many different paths. And *their* success starts with an open door.



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Photographs courtesy of the Universities at Shady Grove and the University of Maryland, Baltimore County.