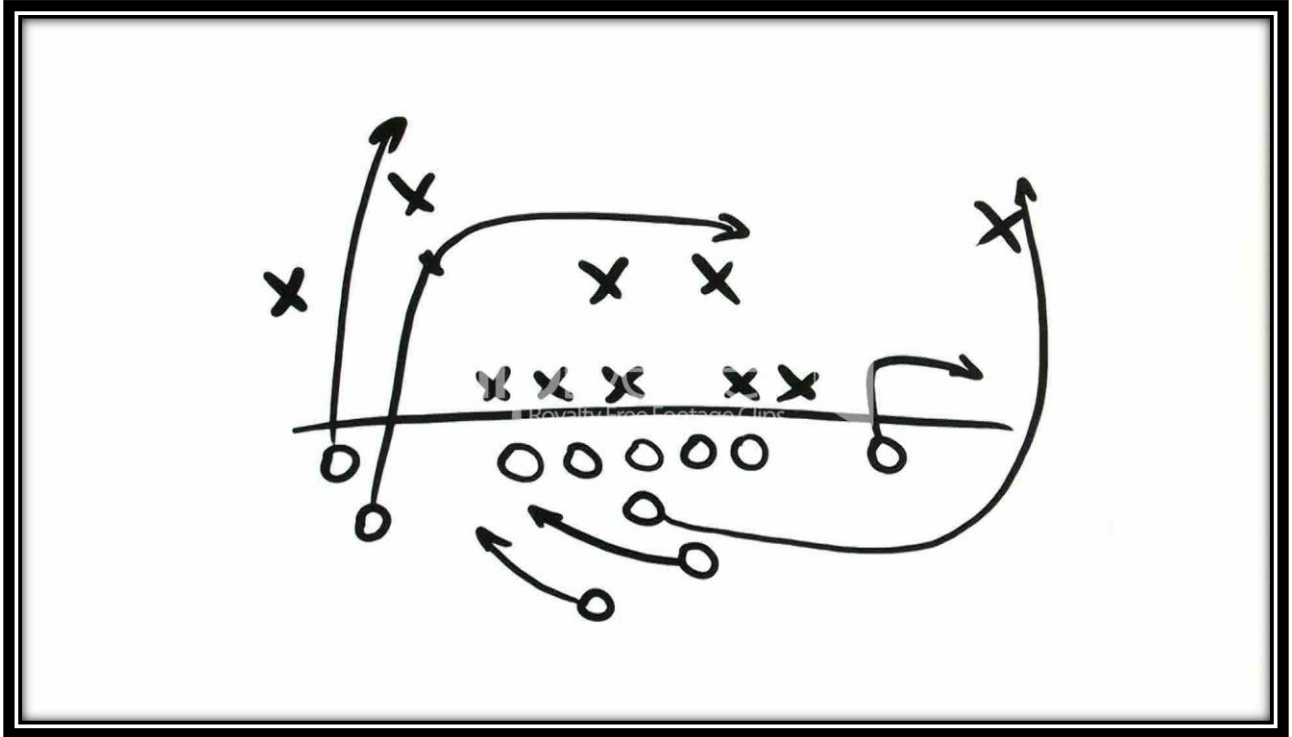


**Building Transfer Student Success at  
Macomb Community College:  
*The Playbook***



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## INTRODUCTION

The current national focus on postsecondary educational initiatives has put the baccalaureate degree at the forefront of the student success agenda as the minimum credential required to support economic development in our country. The high cost of attendance at four-year institutions, deficits in students' academic preparedness, and the need to manage personal and family obligations, influence many students to begin their educational path to a baccalaureate degree at a community college. Yet while the majority of community college students intend to earn a bachelor's degree, only a small proportion manage to do so.

Macomb Community College, located in southeastern Michigan, provides learning experiences to 48,000 students annually in the form of credit and non-credit courses as well as workforce training. Macomb's enrollment places it among the fifty largest community colleges in the nation, and it ranks within the top twenty in the production of associate degrees. According to a Fall 2012 survey of incoming students, most Macomb students are interested in transferring to earn a bachelor's degree: 47% indicated they would definitely like to transfer and provided a preferred destination college, while 41% indicated that they might want to go to a four-year school, but were not yet sure where.

Macomb is one of the most populous counties in the U.S. without a 4-year public university within its borders. To provide residents of Macomb County with convenient access to public university coursework, the Macomb University Center (UC) was established in 1991 on Macomb Community College's center campus. After earning an associate degree at Macomb, students can apply for admission to one of 12 university partners and complete over 75 bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees without leaving the Macomb campus. Most of the bachelor's degrees offered at the UC are built on a transfer plan between Macomb and the partner, allowing students to seamlessly transfer credits to junior standing in the major – that is, if they have followed the appropriate transfer plan.

In 2013, Macomb Community College developed the University Partners Advisory Council (U-PAC) to further strengthen its relationships with key transfer destinations. Current U-PAC members include Central Michigan University, Eastern Michigan University, Ferris State University, Lawrence Technological University, Madonna University, Michigan State University, Oakland University, Rochester College, University of Detroit-Mercy, University of Michigan-Ann Arbor and Dearborn, Walsh College, Wayne State University, and Western Michigan University – all of whom participated in this study. Recent agenda items have included national and state legislative issues, trends affecting Michigan community colleges and universities, academic preparedness, data related to the performance and success of transfer students, and programming opportunities to support enrollment objectives.

Across the country, colleges are beginning to experiment with transfer pathways that would support more students in transferring to, and succeeding at, a four-year institution. The most promising transfer pathway strategies, however, have proven difficult to implement in "thick" transfer markets, such as the one in which Macomb Community College and its many transfer destinations is located. In addition, Michigan is a decentralized state in regards to higher education. There is no formal legislative authority governing higher education policy which results in very little mandated data reporting that can assist in the analysis of transfer student success. We embarked on a study that would allow Macomb to work with its key transfer destinations, as well as the Community College Research Center (CCRC) at the Teachers College, Columbia University, to collect and analyze data in an effort to understand different types of transfer students, their success rates at the various destinations, and the factors that underlie their success and failure. These analyses enabled Macomb and its transfer destinations to take the first steps toward the design of a new model to support transfer student success.

## STEPS

### 1. *Identify a Champion*

*Even if you don't plan to seek funding support through a foundation or agency, pick a "principal investigator" who will be the point person for the project. This person can also "recruit" key individuals at your partner institutions to participate and help them to understand the importance of the project.*

For Macomb's study...

This person was responsible for the U-PAC, oversaw Macomb's transfer initiatives, and became the PI for the grant.

### 2. *Define What You Want to Know*

*Determine what you want to learn (research questions), about whom (student definitions), and during what timeframe (study years).*

For Macomb's study...

#### **Research Questions:**

1. What are the characteristics of transfer students? - - transfer types, demographics (age, gender, financial aid recipient, etc.), credit accumulation, completion
2. What are the enrollment patterns of transfer students? - - # of colleges attended, enrollment intensity, stop out, credits accrued pre- and post-transfer, excess credits, match in major/degree area before and after transfer
3. What are the predictors of transfer student completion? - - types of transfer students, student characteristics, enrollment patterns

#### **Student Definitions and Study Timeframe:**

Students who matriculated at the four-year college as a transfer student between Fall 2007 and Spring 2009, and who attended Macomb at any point prior to entry (this definition also includes First Time In Any College students who earned dual-enrollment credits at Macomb, as well as students who matriculated at the four-year while co-enrolled at Macomb). Each student was tracked through the Spring of 2017 (the term ending May 2017) which provided information regarding length of time to complete a degree.

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For Macomb's study (cont.)...

Overall, 56,476 students enrolled at Macomb between spring 2007 and spring 2009. Among this group of students, we identified a subset of 43,662 students who completed 9 or more credits, as an indicator for students who are more likely to seek a degree. Of those who completed 9 or more credits, 5,336 transferred between fall 2007 and spring 2009, including 4,361 who transferred to a four-year institution (79% of all transfers). Among four-year transfers, 3,625 students enrolled in a U-PAC institution. This research matched transcript records for 2,159 students and provided valid degree completion data for 2,111.

Over 83% of those students who transferred from Macomb to a 4-year institution transferred to a U-PAC institution.

Transfer Students were categorized –


*Direct Transfer:* Students who transfer once from Macomb to a U-PAC institution. We also refer to these students as “2-4 transfer” based on their pattern of enrollment in a two-year institution then four-year institution.

*Reverse Transfer:* Students who enrolled at Macomb, transferred to a U-PAC institution, and then returned to back to Macomb. We also refer to these students as “2-4-2 transfers” based on their enrollment pattern.

*Swirlers:* Students who began at Macomb, then transferred to a U-PAC institution, and subsequently transferred to another institution. These students have attended at least three different postsecondary institutions.

### 3. *Gather Support*

*Determine which institutions will participate, who will do the analysis, determine the cost and how you will pay for any expenses related to the study, and, if funding will be pursued, who will help prepare the funding proposal.*



For Macomb's study ...

#### **Participants:**

All fourteen U-PAC member institutions participated.

#### **Analysis:**

Macomb partnered with CCRC to do the analysis. This expense could be eliminated or reduced by having one of the participants' institutional researchers complete the analysis.

#### **Budget and Funding:**

The expenses for this study totaled \$300,000 with the budget broken down as follows:

- 48%: CCRC for Contracted Services – Data Manipulation, Analyses, Reports
- 23%: U-PAC Institutions – Time & Effort for their Data Query
- 22%: Macomb Staff Time & Effort – Project, Grant, Presentations
- 7%: Travel, Mileage, Activities

Macomb sought funding from The Kresge Foundation.

A Pre-Proposal was prepared by Macomb to determine The Kresge Foundation's interest in supporting the study. The Pre-Proposal was 5 pages in length and included, an overview of project purpose, documented the need to study transfer through citations of previous research and peer-reviewed sources, stated the research goals of the study, and a description of data to be collected.

The Kresge Foundation then invited Macomb to submit a full Proposal. This document was 15 pages long and was jointly prepared jointly by Macomb, the U-PAC members, and CCRC. It included an overview of issue, a statement of the problem – with cited references, proposed activities and deliverables, how results would be disseminated, the anticipated timeline and letters of support from all U-PAC institutions as well as various higher education organizations from across the state of Michigan.

#### **4. Legal**

*Determine what agreements will be necessary for the sharing of data.*



For Macomb's study ...

##### **Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) for Exchanging Data:**

1. Between Macomb and 4-Year Institution
2. Between 4-Year Institution and CCRC
3. Payment to 4-Year for Data Query Time & Effort

We had 14 different legal counsels reviewing 3 separate MOUs for the project as we worked through FERPA issues, etc. This took much longer than the original timeline projected. Don't underestimate the time required to complete this step!

##### **FERPA:**

We were very cognizant of ensuring compliance with FERPA regulations. After much discussion, it was determined that this study did not violate FERPA based on that fact that FERPA regulations allow "student information may be disclosed when an organization is conducting studies to improve instruction with the intention of improving student preparedness and outcomes" (Code of Federal Regulations, §99.31 a.6.ii., 2000).

## 5. Data Requirements

Decide on the data elements that are needed to answer your research questions.

For Macomb's study...

We initially worked with CCRC to develop the data elements for the study. This was reviewed, discussed, and modified based on feedback with all of the U-PAC partners.

Category	Elements	By Semester <sup>1</sup>
College	Your college's name	
Student Unique Identifier (five data fields allowing Macomb to match the student records)	Universal Identification Code (Michigan UIC)	
	First name	
	Middle name or initial	
	Last name	
	Date of Birth (Excel short date format)	
Basic Demographics	Gender	
	Ethnicity (IPEDS definition)	
Transfer Cohort	Year and term of matriculation at your college	
Program Major	Major declaration information	X
Financial aid data (optional – include those readily available at your college)	Pell status (Pell recipient; applied but not eligible; did not apply)	X
	Expected family contribution (EFC)	X
	Dependency status	X
	Number of dependents	X
Program	Application major and last major on record	
Course transcript information (courses taken at your own college)	Course prefix and number <sup>2</sup>	X
	Course hegis or CIP code	X
	Course credit hours	X
	Grade (including failure and withdrawal codes) <sup>3</sup>	X
Credentials	Credential type earned	X
	Major field hegis or CIP code	X

<sup>1</sup> Data requested for each semester a student is enrolled, from the starting semester at your school, through Spring 2015. All "by semester" data should be indexed by semester and year of enrollment. <sup>2</sup> For example, "ENG 101." College should also provide rules to interpret which range of course numbers designate remedial or non-credit coursework, and if applicable, which numbers designate lower-division versus upper-division courses. If college cannot supply CIP or hegis subject-area codes for courses, please provide a key to understanding course prefixes (e.g., does "ENG" represent English or Engineering?). <sup>3</sup> College should provide a key to explain grades.

For Maccomb's study (cont.)...

Excel templates were provided to the 4-year institutions to assist with pulling the data to ensure a consistent data report for matching purposes.

Below are samples:

Student Demographics –

Unique Identifier Code (UIC)	First Name	Middle Name	Last Name	Birth Date	College	Gender	Race	Cohort	Application Major CIP
3749384738	Jane	M	Doe	01/22/1980	State College	F	Black	FA07	240102
	Adam	Daimler	Smith	11/24/1979	State College	M	Hisp	SP08	513802
3829473840	Juana		Garcia	03/14/1985	State College	F	White	FA07	
2349872349	Sue	S	Smith	10/11/1984	State College	U	Unk	FA07	240101
9382347234	Jim	J	Jones	11/22/1984	State College	U	Two or more	FA08	230101

Coursework –

Unique Identifier Code (UIC)	First Name	Middle Name	Last Name	Birth Date	Term	Course Hegis Code	Course	Program Major CIP	Credits	Grade
8495739280	John	Xavier	Smith	12/14/1958	FA09	2204	ECO201	520901	3	C-Average
8495739280	John	Xavier	Smith	12/14/1958	SP10	1501	ENG111	520901	3	A-Excellent
8495739280	John	Xavier	Smith	12/14/1958	SP11	5010	HRI101	520901	3	W-Withdrawal
3749384738	Jane	M	Doe	01/22/1980	FA13	0401	BIO141	240102	4	A-Excellent
3749384738	Jane	M	Doe	01/22/1980	FA09	0401	BIO141	240102	4	B-Good
	Adam	Daimler	Smith	11/24/1979	FA09	0401	BIO141	240102	4	B-Good
	Adam	Daimler	Smith	11/24/1979	SU09	5201	HLT143	240102	3	A-Excellent



For Maccomb's study (cont.)...

Graduates –

Unique Identifier Code (UIC)	First Name	Middle Name	Last Name	Birth Date	Award	Award Term	Award CIP
8495739280	John	Xavier	Smith	12/14/1958	BA	SP12	520901
8495739280	John	Xavier	Smith	12/14/1958	MA	SP14	520101
3829473840	Juana		Garcia	03/14/1985	BS	SU12	520401

Financial Aid –

Unique Identifier Code (UIC)	First Name	Middle Name	Last Name	Birth Date	Term	Pell Need Status	Dependent	Num Dependents	EFC	Pell Amount
8495739280	John	Xavier	Smith	12/14/1958	FA08	1	1	4	0	2532
8495739280	John	Xavier	Smith	12/14/1958	FA09	1	1	4	0	2600
3749384738	Jane	M	Doe	01/22/1980	FA07	2	1	2	0	
3829473840	Juana		Garcia	03/14/1985	FA07	1	2	0	1200	500
3829473840	Juana		Garcia	03/14/1985	SP08	1	2	0	1000	800

**pell\_need\_status:** 1=yes (applied, eligible), 2=no (applied, not eligible); blank = did not apply.

**dependent:** 1=yes, 2=no

## 6. Data Linkage, Sharing, and Analysis

*Determine who will share the data, how the data will be shared securely and how you will evaluate the data.*

For Macomb's study...

### **Data Linkage:**

To link the transfer student provided by the four-year institution with Macomb's records, a data match was performed when possible. Macomb then assigned each student a new anonymized ID, and dropped all personal identifiers (name, birthdate, and UIC) from the data. *After the data was anonymized*, Macomb forwarded the data to CCRC for analysis. Macomb kept the key for the anonymized IDs.

### **Data Exchange:**

To ensure files were shared securely, data were uploaded to secure FTP sites at both Macomb and CCRC.

### **Data Analyses:**

Determining the analyses that you will complete on the data can be determined during the collection process -- additional analyses will likely arise after your initial results.

### **Macomb's Key Findings:**

- **Prioritize transfer institutions** with which to work based on student transfer data; three quarters of Macomb transfer students pursue completion of their bachelor's degree at four U-PAC institutions.
- **Improve bachelor's degree completion** (63% of the study sample completed a bachelor's degree) by 1) prioritizing transfer, 2) create clear programmatic pathways with aligned high-quality instruction, and 3) provide tailored transfer student advising.
- **Reduce excess credits** by evaluating the credit requirements for degrees at your own institution and working with the transfer destinations to determine why credits may not be accepted.
- **Implement the guided pathways model** as part of a broader transfer reform strategy to include mapping the pathways to meet students' end goals, helping students get on a path and stay on the path to completion, and making sure students learn the skills and knowledge appropriate to their program and goals.
- **Identify transfer students earlier** in their post-secondary pursuits. Mechanisms for the early identification of transfer students at the community college as well as prospective high school students intending to transfer should be implemented.



For Macomb's study (cont.)...

- **Implement a transfer advisory council** using the UPAC concept – even if your institution is in a market where it's just you and one other partner. Formalize a process to meet regularly, discuss issues, and build relationships among the administrators and faculty at both institutions.
- **Develop a joint support services network** between the community college and transfer destination(s) that includes a collaborative student intake process and financial aid packaging.
- **Develop a navigational transfer framework** to include an audit of transferrable coursework ensuring credits earned are not only transferrable, but are also applicable to a student's program of study. This framework could be used independently by a student as a check to determine their next steps in the process as well as by advisors and faculty as triggers to offer options to students and move them through the process to ensure timely completion.
- **Promote the engagement of faculty.** Institutions should promote an awareness of transfer among the faculty and incentivize them to engage with their peers to enhance transfer pathways as a mechanism to improve course transferability.
- **Develop and promote supports that encourage students to attend full-time.** Recent research from CCRC and CCCSE (Community College Center for Student Engagement) noted greater student success if students attended at least one semester on a full-time basis including better retention by returning for a second year.
- **Strategize with policymakers** to develop a system of data collection and tracking that will allow for enhanced data-driven transfer processes at the state-level and incentivize collaboration among community colleges and four-year institutions.

The *Building Transfer Student Success at Macomb Community College: A Report on Transfer and Degree Completion* is available at [www.macomb.edu](http://www.macomb.edu) and provides the comprehensive results of the study, including descriptive characteristics of the student sample studied, their enrollment patterns, and the findings based on the analyses completed by CCRC.

## CONCLUSION

Whether your institution is in a “thick” or “thin” market, collaboration with your transfer partners is essential. The more knowledge you share, the greater the potential for improving transfer student success!

## **Acknowledgements**

The author of this Playbook could like to thank:

### **THE KRESGE FOUNDATION**

The Kresge Foundation is a \$3.5 billion private, national foundation that works to expand opportunities in America's cities through grant making and social investing in arts and culture, education, environment, health, human services and community development in Detroit.

### **THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE RESEARCH CENTER**

The Community College Research Center (CCRC), Teachers College, Columbia University, conducts research on the major issues affecting community colleges in the United States to inform the development of practice and policy that expands access to higher education and promotes success for all students.

### **UNIVERSITY PARTNERS ADVISORY COUNCIL at Macomb Community College**

The University Partners Advisory Council (U-PAC) is comprised of fourteen four-year institutions that work collaboratively with Macomb Community College to improve student success and degree completion. All members of the U-PAC participated in and supported this study.

A special thank-you to all of the U-PAC member representatives from:

Central Michigan University, Eastern Michigan University, Ferris State University, Lawrence Technological University, Madonna University, Michigan State University, Oakland University, Rochester College, University of Detroit-Mercy, University of Michigan-Ann Arbor and Dearborn, Walsh College, Wayne State University, and Western Michigan University

### **MACOMB COMMUNITY COLLEGE**

Macomb Community College is located in southeast Michigan and provides learning experiences to more than 48,000 students annually. It is ranked in the top two percent nationally for associate degrees granted and offers 200 degree and certificate programs. In addition, the college houses the University Center for bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees through partnerships with 4-year institutions as well as the Macomb Center for the Performing Arts and Lorenzo Cultural Center.

A special thank you to all of the Macomb staff that supported this study!