

Lumina Foundation Grant Furthers Tennessee Higher Education Efforts to Boost Degree Completion in Transfer Students

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NASHVILLE — An estimated 1,300 students who transfer each year from Tennessee community colleges to four-year institutions before finishing their associate degrees will soon be able to get that degree credential thanks to “reverse transfer” and a partnership involving every public and a range of private higher education institutions in the state.

A joint venture of the University of Tennessee System (UT), Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR), Tennessee Independent Colleges and Universities Association (TICUA) and Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC) will make it possible for students who transfer from Tennessee community colleges to four-year institutions to receive an associate degree when requirements are met in pursuit of a bachelor’s degree.

Typically, a student who transfers from a community college before completing all the requirements of a two-year associate degree does not receive that degree credential, even though all the courses may transfer to the four-year institution. An associate degree is seen as a valuable job-seeking credential for undergraduate students working their way through college. Studies also show a 10 percent increase in four-year graduation rates for students awarded associate degrees by reverse transfer.

A nearly \$400,000 grant from Lumina Foundation, an Indianapolis-based private foundation dedicated to expanding access to and success in education beyond high school, is accelerating the launch of the reverse transfer process, expected to be fully implemented in spring 2015.

The grant provides funding for a software system to centralize and automate college credit review and to notify transfer students if and when they complete requirements for the associate degree. Students then will have the opportunity to receive the associate degree while enrolled at a four-year institution.

Nine public universities, 13 community colleges and eight private, regionally accredited institutions from within the UT, TBR and TICUA systems are participating. At least 12 additional TICUA schools are expected to join the partnership.

“Currently, only 32 percent of Tennesseans have certificates or degrees beyond high school, and studies show that by 2025, that number must be 55 percent to meet workforce demands,” Gov. Bill Haslam said. “Our ‘Drive to 55’ initiative is focused on increasing the number of Tennesseans with post-secondary credentials, and reverse transfer is another tool to help us achieve our goals.”

In September 2012, the University of Tennessee System convened and charged a statewide taskforce with creating a reverse transfer process, at the recommendation of the legislature. In 2013, the governor’s budget included a one-time, \$300,000 appropriation to partially underwrite start-up costs.

UT Knoxville’s Center for Business and Economic Research will manage the centralized software being obtained through a competitive bid process. The center already runs various longitudinal data projects for the state and has the ability to develop and implement the reverse transfer process and to facilitate data

collection that will complement other long-term education and economic outcome studies.

“The University of Tennessee shares the state’s commitment to seeing a greater percentage of Tennesseans earn college degrees,” said UT System President Joe DiPietro. “We also recognize the numerous challenges transfer students face, and we’re pleased to help find solutions to overcome those challenges.”

“It’s important that these students have the opportunity to receive the degree they’ve earned,” said Tennessee Board of Regents Chancellor John Morgan. “The reverse transfer program is another demonstration of the quality education provided at our community colleges. The credits earned there, and the success students achieve through their hard work will soon be recognized with a formal degree. That degree then opens up a world of opportunity for students and helps Tennessee grow its educated workforce. We appreciate Lumina Foundation’s support of our efforts to support student success.”

Lumina Foundation awarded the University of Tennessee System a \$392,800 grant to further facilitate and accelerate creation of a reverse transfer process. Grant funding from Lumina’s “Credit When It’s Due” program was awarded to a total of 15 recipients, including the partnership involving public and private Tennessee higher education institutions.

Approximately 2,300 students transfer each year from Tennessee’s community colleges to four-year universities with at least 45 of the 60 credit hours required for most associate degrees. Initial projections estimate at least half, about 1,300, of those students will be eligible for a reverse transfer associate degree once the process is fully implemented.

Initially, the reverse transfer process will involve only the 40 majors in the [Tennessee Transfer Pathway](#) program. While the 40 in existence also are the most commonly pursued, all other associate degree majors will be added as soon as possible.

Features of the reverse transfer program include:

- An automated reverse transfer credit-review system
- An online portal where students and their advisors can monitor degree progress, reverse transfer degree status and course options for completion
- A robust database that identifies and tracks course-taking patterns, persistence and degree completion among participants at a four-year institution before and after obtaining an associate degree

A website to further explain and promote reverse transfer in Tennessee is being developed and is expected to launch for public viewing in summer 2014.

Next steps on the reverse transfer timeline include:

- Contracting with a software provider, developing the automated credit-review process and launching training and marketing efforts, expected spring 2014
- Piloting the process at three universities, ideally four-year schools within each system with neighboring community colleges, expected summer 2014
- Implementing the process at half of the participating schools, targeted fall 2014
- Full implementation, targeted spring 2015

Initiatives already completed or under way as a result of legislation and collaboration among higher education leaders include:

- Common core standards and other college readiness initiatives in partnership with high schools
- Assessment programs to award college credit for prior college-level learning
- Dual credit programs allowing high school students to earn college credits
- Remedial math reform at the college level
- College completion academies focused on increasing retention and graduation rates
- Outcomes-based public higher education funding formula
- Summer school inclusion in HOPE lottery scholarship eligibility
- Universal pathways ensuring credit transfer between two- and four-year schools
- Pilot programs testing new online learning technologies

Tennessee Schools Participating in Reverse Transfer:

Tennessee Board of Regents – Tennessee’s Community Colleges

- Chattanooga State Community College
- Cleveland State Community College
- Columbia State Community College
- Dyersburg State Community College
- Jackson State Community College
- Motlow State Community College
- Nashville State Community College
- Northeast State Community College
- Pellissippi State Community College
- Roane State Community College
- Southwest Tennessee Community College
- Volunteer State Community College
- Walters State Community College

Tennessee Board of Regents Universities

- Austin Peay State University
- East Tennessee State University
- Middle Tennessee State University
- Tennessee State University
- Tennessee Technological University
- University of Memphis

University of Tennessee System Undergraduate Institutions

- UT Chattanooga
- UT Knoxville
- UT Martin

Tennessee Independent Colleges and Universities Association

- Freed-Hardeman University
- Johnson University
- Lee University
- Lincoln Memorial University
- Lipscomb University
- Maryville College
- Memphis College of Art
- Trevecca Nazarene University

Western Governors University Tennessee