



## **Institutional Challenges Associated with Credit Transfer**

Transfer of credit is a major component of the degree advancement programs. The bachelor's degree curriculum is developed with specific general education and professional courses. The previous college credit earned by the candidate may satisfy the programmatic requirements for graduation, reducing the number of courses the candidate must complete to earn the bachelor's degree.

When the candidate applies to a bachelor degree completion program, the accepting institution will evaluate the candidate's transcripts from the associate degree to determine which credits transfer and which do not. Credit transfer is based on how the original course meets course requirements at the accepting institution. Each higher education institution has the freedom to establish unique policies for accepting – or not accepting – credits earned from a different educational institution.<sup>1</sup> It is for this reason that the transfer of previously earned college credit can vary from college to college.

A common practice in evaluating credits for transfer involves determining whether or not the transferred course is equivalent to a similar course at the accepting institution. This is based on the original course's description, goals, and objectives as compared to the equivalent course as well as the quality of the originating course – which may differ among various colleges. If the candidate has previously completed the course English 101 but that course doesn't meet the English course requirement at the accepting institution, the candidate will likely have to re-take the English course to satisfy the requirement.

The accepting institution may also mandate a minimum grade for transfer. For example, the accepting institution may require that all transfer credit must have a minimum grade of "C" or higher. If the candidate's grade is less than a "C," the credit will not transfer and that requirement is not satisfied. If this is a requirement for graduation from the accepting institution, the candidate will likely have to re-take that course.

The candidate may have completed specific courses in the first professional degree that have no equivalency at the accepting institution. If the other criteria are met – usually minimum grade – the accepting institution may credit the candidate's transcript but the credit does not satisfy a specific course requirement. The credit may apply to elective credit and will be applied toward the total credits required for graduation but it may not reduce the number of required courses for earning the degree.

Additionally, some schools operate on the semester system while others operate on the quarter system. Those that operate on the semester systems hold three different academic terms per year, typically 16-week terms in the fall and spring with an 8-week summer term, while those with the quarter system hold four terms per year, typically 10 weeks each. Therefore, semester credits do not equal quarter credits in total weight. When transferring quarter credits to an institution using the semester system, 1.0 quarter credit is equivalent to 0.667 semester credit. Though the student earned enough quarter credits to graduate with an associate degree, the transfer to a semester system may yield less total credits and require more coursework to earn enough credit for graduation.



One of the more problematic issues with degree advancement is the lack of general education credits required by the first professional degree must be completed prior to earning the advanced degree. If an associate program requires only basic English, college math, biology, and psychology for entry into the first-professional respiratory therapy degree program, the degree advancement program candidate will have to complete the remainder of the bachelor degree general education requirements which may include social sciences, history, humanities, anatomy and physiology, chemistry, physics, statistics, etc. In fact, many of these general education courses may be pre-requisite courses to the upper-division respiratory therapy-specific courses. The candidate may be frustrated to spend several semesters completing general education courses that he/she does not feel are relevant to their desired educational outcome.

Most of transfers of credit originate from public 2-year institutions and 90% of transfers occur between institutions that are regionally, not nationally, accredited. Only 3% of credit transfers occur from a nationally accredited college to a regionally accredited college.<sup>1</sup> Regional accreditation is considered to be the gold standard of college education. It is the most widely recognized type of college education and the credits and degrees earned at regionally accredited institutions are typically accepted in transfer. National accreditation has typically focused on career, vocational, and trade schools but credits are not often accepted in transfer to a regionally accredited school. When the first professional degree credits have been earned at a nationally accredited school, the candidates transfer options are very limited. Most regionally accredited colleges and universities will not accept transfer credits from a nationally accredited program. Some degree advancement programs provide a “test out” or “competency” option for the respiratory therapy courses but the general education courses would have to be repeated.

In addition to credit transfers, many degree advancement programs require that the candidate have already earned the Registered Respiratory Therapist (RRT) credential from the NBRC. This requirement may disadvantage the respiratory therapist who has earned the Certified Respiratory Therapist (CRT) credential but not the RRT. The respiratory therapist may be eligible for the RRT but has not yet completed it or the respiratory therapist may have graduated a good number of years in the past from an entry-level program that only qualified its graduates to challenge the CRT credential examination. In the case of the latter, the respiratory therapist would have to contact the NBRC to determine what course of action is required to qualify for the RRT. This process could significantly delay the respiratory therapist’s ability to apply for the degree advancement program.

Similarly, the degree advancement program may require that the candidate have earned an associate degree. Again, a respiratory therapist may have graduated a good number of years in the past from a program that was certificate level only. In that case, the respiratory therapist would have to first earn an associate degree before application to the degree advancement program would be accepted. As with the lack of RRT credential, this could significantly delay the respiratory therapist’s desired timeline.



## References

1. Simone SA. Transferability of postsecondary credit following student transfer or coenrollment: statistical analysis report. National Center for Education Statistics, 2014.

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