



North Carolina
State Board of Community Colleges
Mr. Scott Shook, Chair

March 18, 2016

To: Representative Rob Bryan, Co-Chair
Representative Linda Johnson, Co-Chair
Senator Dan Soucek, Co-Chair
Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee

Mr. Mark Trogdon, Director
Fiscal Research Division

Mr. Drew Heath, Director
Office of State Budget and Management

From: Mr. Scott Shook 

Re: NC Guaranteed Admission Program (NCGAP) Report

As required by Section 11.7 of S.L. 2015-241, both the UNC Board of Governors and the State Board of Community Colleges are required to jointly report on the impacts of NCGAP. The report presented to both boards represents the collective efforts and negotiations of staff from both UNC-General Administration (UNC-GA) and the NC Community College System (NCCCS). After considering the report, however, the State Board of Community Colleges strongly believes it is necessary to highlight the following points:

1. Clear conclusions about the potential impact of NCGAP should not be drawn based on the 2009 cohort data analysis;
2. Key student success strategies have been implemented since 2009, which should result in higher completion rates in the future; and,
3. Transfer student performance data shows that NCCCS graduates are successful at UNC institutions.

First and foremost, we greatly value the strong partnership we have with our colleagues at UNC. Our staff worked with them to identify approaches to meet the goals outlined in NCGAP including attempting to identify an appropriate sample of students for the analysis in this report. The student sample was selected by UNC-GA and RTI International after meetings with NCCCS staff. The selected cohort consisted of students who graduated from high school in 2009; had a weighted 2.5-2.7 high school GPA; took the SAT; applied to at least one UNC institution; and enrolled in either a UNC institution or community college in the fall of 2009. **As is noted in the report, however, both UNC-GA staff and NCCCS staff agree that there are significant limitations as a result of the analysis and any conclusions.** Even with the best student dataset constructed in this analysis, only the use of a prospective, random assignment

study of students to a community college or UNC institution can give true causal estimates. Therefore, the State Board of Community Colleges believes it is important to highlight these limitations or barriers to student success and more importantly illustrate how they have been improved upon since 2009.

2009 Cohort Analysis Limitations

- **Ineffective comprehensive articulation agreement between UNC and NCCCS.** Prior to the implementation of the revised Comprehensive Articulation Agreement (CAA) in the fall of 2014, students who completed an A.A. or A.S. degree were nevertheless required by some UNC institutions to complete additional general education requirements, and therefore, were required to take additional courses after transferring to a UNC institution. For those students who did not complete an associate degree or the general education core requirements prior to transferring to a UNC institution, there was no guarantee that those courses would transfer to the UNC institution. Thus, whether the student completed an associate degree or transferred prior to earning a degree, the requirement to earn additional credits potentially increased the time to baccalaureate completion.
- **No requirement to complete a college transfer success course.** In 2009, students who completed an associate degree were not required to successfully complete a college transfer success course. The goal of the college transfer success course (ACA 122) is to ensure that students are equipped to develop an academic plan to successfully *transition* – not simply transfer – to a senior institution.
- **Existence of barriers to enrolling in college-level courses.** In 2009, students were placed in remedial (developmental) courses according to performance on the College Placement Test/Accuplacer, SAT or ACT. High school GPA was not a factor. Furthermore, remedial courses took up to two years to complete and were not targeted to ensure that students covered only the remedial competencies needed. Both of these factors resulted in too many students being placed in remedial courses for too long before being able to enroll in college-level coursework, thereby reducing the likelihood of degree completion and increasing time to degree completion.
- **Inability to account for socioeconomic and other factors including commitment to complete a baccalaureate degree.** The 2009 cohort analysis is limited by an inability to determine socioeconomic or other factors that may have led to a student's decision to enroll in a particular institution. Additionally, it is unclear whether the students that started at a community college in the 2009 cohort had the same commitment to completing a baccalaureate degree as those who would participate in NCGAP.

Post-2009 Changes: Current Student Success Strategies. As of 2016, many of the 2009 barriers to student success are no longer present. These changes apply to all college transfer students,

including students who would participate in NCGAP. Had these strategies been in place for the 2009 cohort, the completion rates may have been higher.

- **Revised CAA.** Working together, UNC and the NCCCS revised the Comprehensive Articulation Agreement in 2014 to:
 - **Guarantee acceptance of general education coursework.** Students who complete an AA/AS degree are guaranteed to have completed all lower level general education requirements and will transfer with junior status.
 - **Guarantee acceptance of universal general education transfer credits.** For students who do not complete an associate degree, the CAA also provides for a 30-hour universal general education transfer component of courses guaranteed to transfer for general education credit to all 16 public universities.
 - **Reduce number of credit hours for AA/AS degree.** The CAA also reduces the number of credit hours for AA/AS degrees from 64-65 hours to 60-61 hours and establishes more well-defined baccalaureate pathways.
 - **Require completion of College Transfer Success course.** Under the revised CAA, students are required to complete ACA 122, College Transfer Success, as part of the associate degree curriculum. This newly standardized and revised course includes strategic planning, critical thinking, and communication skills necessary for a successful academic transition. Furthermore, students are advised to select a transfer major and preferred university before completing the 30 semester hours of credit. According to the most recent CAA report to the General Assembly, there has been a 166% increase in student enrollment in ACA 122 from fall 2010 to fall 2014.
- **Remedial Education Changes.** The NCCCS is now using more reliable and valid assessment and placement instruments in determining which students need remedial education. In addition, remedial education is now modularized to ensure that students receive only the material they need. Curriculum FTE in remedial education has declined from 13.8% in 2010-11 to 5.6% in 2014-15. Credit-level math enrollments increased by 8% in 2014 over the previous year, including a greater than 7% increase in successful completion. Both of these strategies help reduce time to associate degree completion. In addition, the NCCCS is working to implement the Career and College Ready Graduate legislation which will ensure that public high school seniors, including potential NCGAP participants, are academically ready for community college coursework.

NCCCS Graduates are Successful at UNC Institutions. As stated in the report, and we reiterate here, it is important to note the limitations of the 2009 cohort analysis, which may erroneously leave the impression that community college transfer students are not successful at UNC institutions. Data on transfer student performance, however, clearly shows otherwise. Even prior to the CAA revisions, it is clear that community college AA/AS degree transfer students are successful at UNC institutions. Indeed, for the past eight years, community college students who transfer with an associate degree (AA/AS) had a first year UNC institution GPA comparable

to native UNC students.¹ Additionally, as noted in the NCGAP report, the 2015 UNC Transfer Student Report found that transfer students, regardless of high school GPA, entering UNC as juniors in 2009, graduated within four years after transfer at a rate of 71%. Furthermore, within the transfer population (NCCCS transfers with an AA/AS degree and UNC-to-UNC institution transfers), NCCCS transfer students had the highest graduation rate at 74%, again regardless of high school GPA. Given this success, we would urge the General Assembly to consider programming that provides incentives for students, regardless of high school GPA, who choose the associate degree transfer pathways for baccalaureate completion.

Finally, the State Board of Community Colleges wants to assure the General Assembly that our colleges are prepared to implement NCGAP as required by the legislation. Many interventions and policy changes have been made since 2009 to ensure student success, and it is not possible to reflect them in the report. However, while we cannot be sure to what extent these interventions will improve outcomes, we are confident that they will have a positive effect. As evidenced above, the NCCCS has a strong and successful college transfer program, and our community colleges will welcome NCGAP participants. Furthermore, our colleges are fully capable of successfully admitting and effectively advising these students, providing them a sound freshman and sophomore year, and guiding them along a successful transfer pathway to a university.

c: The Honorable Pat McCrory, Governor
The Honorable Tim Moore, Speaker, NC House of Representatives
The Honorable Phil Berger, President Pro Tempore, NC Senate
Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee Members
W. Louis Bissette, Jr., Chairman, UNC Board of Governors
Margaret Spellings, President, University of North Carolina

¹ *Transfer Student 1st Year GPA for Students with an AA/AS Degree*. UNC Data Dashboard, <http://www.northcarolina.edu/content/unc-data-dashboard>.