The Interstate Passport: A New Framework for Transfer

The Interstate Passport Initiative, based at the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE), has launched a new learning-outcomes-based framework for transfer with the goal of improving graduation rates, shortening time to degree, and saving students’ money. The new framework focuses on lower-division general education, the common denominator among institutions—concentrating on it as a whole, not on individual courses—and allows for a cross-border “match” of outcomes-integrated general education for block transfer. Students who earn a Passport at one participating institution and transfer to another one will have their learning achievement recognized; they will not be required to repeat courses at the receiving institution to meet lower-division general education requirements.

Learning Outcomes and Proficiency Criteria for Transfer

The Passport is being rolled out in phases. Phase I, funded by the Carnegie Corporation of New York, was completed in April 2014, with 16 institutions agreeing to award the Passport — and accept Passport transfer students — in the Phase I lower-division content areas of oral communication, written communication, and quantitative literacy. Phase II of the project, funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and Lumina Foundation, commenced in October 2014, with institutions in seven WICHE states participating. During this two-year phase, faculty members from both two- and four-year institutions will work collaboratively to develop Passport Learning Outcomes and attendant Proficiency Criteria for the remaining six lower-division general education content areas: evolving human cultures; human society and the individual; physical/natural world; creative expression; critical thinking; and teamwork and value systems. Through this process, faculty from the Passport participating institutions will acknowledge that their institutions’ lower-division general education learning outcomes in these areas are equivalent to the Passport Learning Outcomes. Institutions are not required to use the same language as the PLOs in their learning outcomes, but rather, to ensure alignment to the PLOs. The academic areas included in the Passport are based on the Liberal Education and America’s Promise Essential Learning Outcomes (LEAP ELOs) developed by the Association of American Colleges and Universities and widely adopted by institutions across the country. At the conclusion of Phase II the Passport will be complete, encompassing all lower-division general education content areas, simplifying the transfer process for many students, and ready for expansion beyond the WICHE region. With approximately 33 percent of today’s students transferring—and nearly 27 percent of them crossing state lines according to a study by the National Student Clearinghouse—the Passport promises a new way to streamline transfer students’ pathways to graduation.

Faculty Agreement and Tracking

The Passport is based on the concepts of faculty agreement and tracking. Faculty members at a Passport institution agree with their colleagues at other Passport institutions to: 1) provide their respective students with appropriate learning opportunities addressing the PLOs; 2) assess these students’ proficiency in achieving the PLOs; and 3) award the Passport to students who have earned it. Each institution agrees to send data to the Passport Central Data Repository (CDR) on the academic performance of Passport and non-Passport students who transfer into their institution for two terms after they transfer. The CDR sorts the data from the receiving institutions and forwards it to the relevant sending institutions for use in their continuous improvement efforts. The CDR also forwards aggregate data to the Passport Review Board for its annual review of the overall performance of the Passport program. During Phase II, the data collection and tracking system will be reviewed and updated with recommendations from participating registrars and institutional researchers in preparation for nationwide deployment at the conclusion of that two-year work.
Looking Ahead and Beyond the WICHE Region

Other institutions and WICHE states may now apply for participation in Phase I of the Passport. The Passport Review Board, whose members consist of the Passport state facilitators plus higher education experts in academic quality, research, student affairs, and other areas of expertise, sets policy and reviews and approves new institutions/states for participation. During Phase II we anticipate an additional six states and 12 institutions to join the project – both within and beyond the WICHE region. Applications for Phase II will be available in spring 2016. Participation in the Passport project by institutions throughout the country will make transfer significantly easier for students, leading to improved completion rates, simplified processes for institutions, and cost savings for students, institutions, and states.

INSTITUTIONS PARTICIPATING IN PHASE II
(October 1, 2014)

CALIFORNIA
TBD – 3 two-year institutions
TBD – 3 four-year institutions

HAWAI‘I
Leeward Community College
University of Hawai‘i West Oahu
University of Hawai‘i Hilo

NORTH DAKOTA
Lake Region State College
North Dakota State University
North Dakota State College of Science
Valley City State University

OREGON
Eastern Oregon University
Blue Mountain Community College

SOUTH DAKOTA
South Dakota State University

UTAH
Dixie State University
Salt Lake Community College
Snow College
Southern Utah University
The University of Utah
Utah State University
Utah Valley University
Weber State University

WYOMING
Laramie County Community College
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www.wiche.edu/passport

Institution Application:
www.wiche.edu/info/passport/institutionApplication.pdf

State Application:
www.wiche.edu/info/passport/stateApplication.pdf