

2018 Updates to the Policies, Procedures, and Guidelines for Tennessee Reverse Transfer

Introduction and Purpose

On April 4, 2012, Tennessee Governor Bill Haslam signed HB 2827 which amended Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 49 relative to higher education. This amendment added the following language to Section 1 Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 49, Chapter 7, Part 1:

The community colleges of the board of regents system are authorized and encouraged to enter into reverse articulation or reverse transfer agreements with the universities of the board of regents and the University of Tennessee systems and with private institutions of higher education that are accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. The universities of the board of regents and the University of Tennessee systems are authorized and encouraged to enter into reverse articulation or reverse transfer agreements with the community colleges of the board of regents system.

In July 2012, a taskforce was convened to develop and implement a Reverse Transfer process across the State of Tennessee. The original taskforce was comprised of members from the Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC), the Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR), the Tennessee Independent Colleges and Universities Association (TICUA), and the University of Tennessee (UT) systems.

The full taskforce defined Reverse Transfer as “a credit review of students who transfer from a community college to a four-year institution prior to receipt of the associate’s degree to determine if and when the students complete the associate degree requirements and, if so, to award them an associate degree.” While the remaining courses required for the associate degree are completed at a Tennessee four-year institution, it is the responsibility of the associate degree-granting institution to verify degree completion and to award the two-year degree.

Subsequently, workgroups were created and charged to develop components of the overall process. The workgroups included members from THEC, TICUA, TBR, and UT. The Policies/Procedures workgroup was charged with the development of academic policy/procedures that will serve as the framework for Reverse Transfer across the State of Tennessee and among the three systems of higher education (TBR, UT, and TICUA). Although the locally-governed institutions (LGIs) are no longer part of the TBR system, commitments and participation in the Reverse Transfer Process remain unchanged.

Working with a third-party vendor to create the Reverse Transfer Solution (RTS) and utilizing internal resources, Tennessee system administrators began to coordinate a semi-automated process whereby credits from a student's 4-year institution transfer back to their previous Tennessee community college. The Solution allows community colleges, state universities, and participating private institutions to manage and track Reverse Transfer on their distinct campuses. Furthermore, RTS allows state administrators to track increases in degree completion, and also positive and negative trends that assist in the coordination of reverse transfer efforts with greater success. The Solution and process are maintained by UT employees and contracts with support funds from THEC.

In the summer 2018 taskforce meeting, members agreed upon a name change that more clearly articulates the purpose and goals of the taskforce. The Reverse Transfer Advisory Council will continue to meet annually with appointed council members annually to address the ongoing needs of the Reverse Transfer initiative. The council's purpose is four-fold:

- To provide expertise and guidance in an advisory capacity to improve Reverse Transfer processes in Tennessee
- To establish Reverse Transfer best practices to facilitate effective collaboration among state partners and to aid in degree completion
- To provide recommendations for Reverse Transfer policy, as needed
- To develop a clear research plan to address Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC) research metrics for Reverse Transfer
- To communicate the Reverse Transfer Program to stakeholders throughout the state

Definitions

1. **The associate degree requirements are verified and the degree is awarded by the appropriate two-year institution. Documentation required for degree award is the purview of the community college and TBR. Once a degree has been granted, the community college will notify the student of their degree.**
2. **Potential regular Reverse Transfer degree candidates are those students who:**
 - **are currently enrolled in the preceding or current semester (excluding summer terms) at a participating Tennessee four-year institution and were previously enrolled at a Tennessee community college or other Tennessee associate degree-granting institution;**
 - **have earned a minimum of 25% of their credits (15 credit hours) at the associate degree-granting institution; have earned a combined minimum of 60 total college-level credits; and, have not previously earned a college degree.**
3. **The screening degree audit will be run on those consenting students (opted-in) who are currently enrolled at a Tennessee four-year institution and were previously enrolled at a Tennessee community college or other Tennessee associate degree-granting institution, have earned a combined minimum of 60 total college-level credits and have successfully transferred a minimum of 12 college credits towards an associate degree at the associate degree-granting institution.** A four-year institution may not accept all credits earned at the associate degree-granting institution (e.g., grades of “D”) that may in fact count towards the associate degree. Therefore, a threshold of “successfully transferred” credits that is less than the minimum residency credits required at the associate degree-granting institution was established to capture and include those students who may have not had all earned degree credits accepted by the four-year institution. Students meeting this threshold are considered to be “close” to degree completion for purposes of the screening degree audit. The associate degree-granting institution will still have responsibility for the official degree audit and degree conferral, if the student is eligible.

Participation

1. **All TBR, LGI, and UT institutions will participate in Reverse Transfer as encouraged and supported by the State of Tennessee HB 2827.** TICUA institutions may choose to participate. Public universities and colleges may develop free-standing reverse transfer agreements with non-participating TICUA institutions.

Governance and Compliance

1. **The UT-TBR-TICUA Articulation and Transfer Council will have oversight of the Reverse Transfer process and policies and will review the policy and its impact annually.**
Oversight responsibilities include, but are not limited to, assessment and evaluation of the process, reporting to the Legislature, and modifications in the process/policies as needed.
2. **The Reverse Transfer Advisory Council makes policy recommendations to the Articulation and Transfer Council annually during council meetings, and more often as needed.**
3. **The University of Tennessee Center for Business and Economic Research (CBER) will house and maintain the server and will have primary responsibility for the stored data (demographic and academic) as well as the data extracted for evaluation and reporting purposes.** CBER will maintain the confidentiality and integrity of the data and will have primary responsibility for research and reporting related to Reverse Transfer. Data collected for the Reverse Transfer process will not be integrated into or become part of the Tennessee Longitudinal Data System (TLDS) unless approved by the Chancellor/President on each campus. CBER will collaborate with THEC, TBR, TICUA, and UT throughout the evaluation and reporting processes. In addition, each campus/system may designate an individual to have access to individual records for their students to conduct additional research and/or to validate the number of students receiving an associate degree and their credit hours reported to THEC. Permissions and access to data to be used for research purposes is coordinated by CBER.
4. **Policies/procedures must be in compliance with the standards of accreditation set forth by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC).**
 - a. Reverse Transfer candidates must complete "...at least 25 percent of the credit hours required for the degree" at the Tennessee institution awarding the associate's degree. (Standard 9.4)
 - b. Reverse Transfer candidates must adhere to the Catalog requirements established by the degree-granting institution. (Standard 9.7)

All student information shared between and among institutions to facilitate Reverse Transfer awards must be in compliance with FERPA guidelines and applicable State of Tennessee statutes. Policies

1. **The Tennessee funding formula reflects a spirit of full collaboration among Tennessee institutions of higher education and rewards participating Tennessee institutions equally for degrees awarded by reverse transfer.** Reverse Transfer, an initiative to

promote the educational attainment of adult learners through the full cooperation and collaboration among Tennessee institutions of higher education, will result in the generation of student and institutional outcomes where none previously existed.

2. **Each institution will be responsible for the accuracy of equivalency tables [maintained through TNReconnect.gov] and degree audits.** Equivalency tables must be reviewed at least twice annually (a minimum of once per cycle, prior to when the simulated degree audit is performed in RTS), and degree requirements must be reviewed and updated annually, or as new programs are approved. AcademyOne uses the Academic Program Inventory Report from THEC to code programs into the system. It is important that these reports be error-free in order to ensure the accuracy of equivalency tables. Training and support will be provided by state-wide administrators, as requested, to facilitate this process.
3. **The “last hours” policy shall be waived for Reverse Transfer degree candidates at all Tennessee institutions.** Requiring students to complete any number of “last hours” at the community college would potentially place undue hardship on the student and would be counter-intuitive to the intent of Reverse Transfer.
4. **To adhere to the FERPA guidelines the student must agree to the exchange of course histories and/or official transcripts among all the two- and four-year institutions attended as well as the high school transcript for use in the reverse transfer degree process, including the semi-automated degree audit screening and post-screening/degree award. The process to obtain student consent must include a reasonable way to identify the individual and authenticate the identity of the student as the source of the consent to the disclosure of the education records.** Schools must obtain written consent (e.g., hard copy, electronic consent) from those students who appear to have the credits for associate degree completion prior to sending the results of the screening degree audit to the associate degree-granting institution. The communication to the student must include the purpose for sending the information, the institution to which the student’s information will be sent, and the option to revoke participation in the reverse transfer process at any time. The communication to the student must inform the student his/her consent includes permission for the two- and four-year institutions to exchange transcripts (hard copy or electronic) and to obtain the high school transcript if needed in conjunction with the Tennessee Reverse Transfer process. Additionally, four-year institutions may provide a section on the transfer application to allow for the exchange of the screening degree audit results for reverse transfer audit purposes or to opt-out of the reverse transfer degree audit.

5. **If a Reverse Transfer degree candidate attended more than one associate degree-granting institution prior to transferring to a four-year institution, the degree-confirming institution will be the institution where the student earned the most credits, provided the student earned a minimum of 15 credits at that institution to meet the SACSCOC residency requirement (Standard 9.4) and the student meets the requirements for an associate degree at that institution.** In the event the student has earned the same number of credits and meets the residency and degree requirements at two or more institutions, the institution that the student attended most recently will be considered as the degree-granting institution.
6. **Students will not be assessed a fee to have the screening degree audit report sent to the associate degree-granting institutions in the degree audit process of Reverse Transfer.** Students will not be assessed a fee for the exchange of transcripts (hard copy or electronic) between the student's former 2-year institution and his/her current 4-year institution for use in the reverse transfer degree process, including the semi-automated degree audit screening and post-screening/degree award.
7. **Reverse Transfer degree recipients will not be assessed a graduation fee at the associate degree-granting institution.**
8. **Each community college and each participating four-year institution will designate a contact person for Reverse Transfer.** The contact person will serve as a point of information to students, faculty, and advisors. The contact person's information will be available on the Reverse Transfer website.
9. **Students are afforded due process under the appeals process and procedures outlined in the Catalog at the appropriate institution.**
10. **Once a degree is conferred (baccalaureate or associate), the student will not be considered further for the reverse transfer process.**
11. **Reverse Transfer degrees may be awarded outside of the RTS.** Occasionally, a student may wish to opt-in to Reverse Transfer *after* the designated opt-in period of a given reverse transfer cycle. A student may still opt-in at their four-year institution and request their transcripts through their former community college's registrar's office for the purposes of Reverse Transfer; however, the student's information will not be included in the file uploaded into the RTS and will, therefore, not be tracked in the system. In the event that a student wishes to opt-in outside of the regular reverse transfer cycle, open communication between the student's two- and four-year institutions is strongly recommended in order to ensure proper review and tracking of this student in the event that a reverse transfer degree is awarded. Community colleges are strongly encouraged to track these students outside of the RTS in their SIS. Additionally, community colleges are encouraged to let the UT System Office know of degrees awarded outside of the RTS. Establishing this process allows state

administrators to more accurately count and track the impact of Reverse Transfer throughout the state.

- 12. Reverse Transfer degree may be awarded outside of the state at the discretion of the Tennessee institution.**

Procedures

- 1. Initially, Reverse Transfer degree awards will be limited to those degree programs that are currently identified as a Tennessee Transfer Pathway.** Community colleges also have the discretion to award the A.A. and A.S. University Parallel degrees as reverse awards where applicable. All other associate degree programs should be added to the Reverse Transfer process as quickly as feasible. Additionally, all two-year degrees may be considered for and awarded through Reverse Transfer. While it is likely that the majority of Reverse Transfer degrees awarded will be either A.A. or A.S. degrees, it is possible that a student could complete the A.A.S., or A.S.T. degree requirements at a four-year institution, in which case the degree eligibility assessment would be made at the two-year institution.
- 2. Starting in the fall 2018 cycle, a two phase, pre-opt in process will begin whereby students may opt-in to Reverse Transfer as they complete their transfer application for a TN four-year institution.** By fall 2019, all institutions will include pre-opt in consent language in their transfer applications to allow students to opt-in as they prepare to transfer.
- 3. The degree awarding process will be institution-initiated.**
 - The four-year institutions will generate each spring and fall semester (for May and December degree awards, respectively) to identify potential degree candidates. Potential degree candidates will be identified through a match of descriptive attributes which may include full name, permanent address, birth date, or other identifiers.
 - The RTS will send those students email invitations to participate (consent/opt-in) or decline. In addition, beginning in fall 2019, opt-in will occur as students complete their transfer applications [see **Procedure 2**].
 - Screening degree audits will be run by the RTS and the results will be sent to the respective community colleges.
 - Communication with potentially eligible students at this stage is encouraged and is the responsibility of the community college.
 - The associate degree-granting institution will send eligible students a letter of degree confirmation within 30 days of the award (and ideally sooner), information regarding participation in graduation ceremonies, and then mail the diploma. Students will not need to file a degree application for their reverse transfer degree.
 - A student may decline the degree with notification.

- g. Students being awarded a degree and the hours credited for the degree at the community college and four-year school will be recorded in the data set maintained by CBER [THEC graduation file includes a data definition RT tag]. Community colleges are encouraged to return an updated transcript confirming the associate degree award to the participating four-year institution.
4. **The associate degree-granting institution will notify, in writing, those students whose associate degree audit indicates outstanding academic requirements [or expired course credits, etc.] for the Reverse Transfer associate degree and any “holds” the student may have.**
- a. Students will be notified of their progress toward the Reverse Transfer degree twice a year (spring and fall) to coincide with the reporting schedule identified in **Procedure 2**.
 - b. It is the student’s responsibility to complete any outstanding academic requirements within his/her Catalog time limit in order to be considered for a Reverse Transfer degree.
 - c. It is the student’s responsibility to clear any and all “holds” required by their institutions. However, financial or other “holds” should *not* prevent transcript exchange (prior to and after a degree is awarded) between two- and four-year institutions for the purpose of communicating a reverse transfer award. Diploma and transcript delivery directly to students with financial obligations to the institution are handled according to state law and institutional policy.
5. **Website information for Reverse Transfer was developed with input from UT, TBR, and TICUA, and is located on a website maintained by UT (www.tnreversetransfer.org).** Each participating associate-degree granting institution will have a Reverse Transfer page that will include a link to the Reverse Transfer website. The institution’s Reverse Transfer contact person’s name, email, and telephone number as well as general information about Reverse Transfer will be included on the institution page.

Guidelines

1. **The general education assessment requirement will be waived for Reverse Transfer degree candidates at the discretion of the degree-granting institution.**
 - a. Reverse Transfer degree recipients will then complete the general education assessment as graduating seniors from a Tennessee baccalaureate degree program.
 - b. Therefore, community colleges will not be penalized under THEC *Quality Assurance* guidelines for waiving the general education assessment requirement for Reverse Transfer degree recipients (See **Policy 1** in this document).
2. **Upper division courses completed at a four-year institution may be considered for lower division course substitution on a case-by-case basis.**

- 3. Reverse Transfer degree recipients may participate in the graduation ceremonies at the degree-granting institution.** Students who choose to participate in the ceremony will be responsible for cap and gown rental.

Tennessee Reverse Transfer Advisory Council: Changes recommended to the Transfer and Articulation Council, June 26, 2018

Articulation and Transfer Council: Changes adopted July 25, 2018