**REVIEW OF THE *COMPREHENSIVE ARTICULATION AGREEMENT* THAT EXISTS BETWEEN CONSTITUENT INSTITUTIONS OF
THE NORTH CAROLINA COMMUNITY COLLEGE SYSTEM
AND CONSTITUENT INSTITUTIONS OF
THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA SYSTEM**

A Report to

The Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee,

The Senate Appropriations Committee on Education/Higher Education, and

The House Appropriations Subcommittee on Education

Submitted by

The State Board of Community Colleges and

The Board of Governors of the University of North Carolina

November 1, 2022

As Required by

Session Law 2013-72 (HB 903)

**ANNUAL REPORT ON THE *COMPREHENSIVE ARTICULATION AGREEMENT* TO
THE JOINT LEGISLATIVE EDUCATION OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE**

NOVEMBER 1, 2022

S.L. 2013-72 (HB 903) North Carolina General Statute 116-11(10c) requires the University of North Carolina System and the North Carolina Community College System to conduct biannual joint reviews of the *Comprehensive Articulation Agreement* to ensure that the agreement is fair, current, and relevant for all students and institutions and to report their findings to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee, including all revisions to the *Comprehensive Articulation Agreement* and reports of noncompliance by November 1 of each year. The statute also requires the University of North Carolina System and the North Carolina Community College System jointly develop an articulation agreement advising tool for students, parents, and faculty to simplify the course transfer and admissions process.

SUMMARY

The revised *Comprehensive Articulation Agreement* (*CAA*) was signed by the UNC Board of Governors and the State Board of Community Colleges on February 21, 2014. The *CAA* was implemented in the fall 2014 semester. To date, the Transfer Advisory Committee (TAC) has completed three full rounds of compliance visits to UNC System institutions. There have yet to be any reports of noncompliance by any institution.

The University of North Carolina (UNC) System and the North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS) continue to work to enhance educational opportunities for NCCCS students by improving transfer administration, utilizing data to assess transfer effectiveness, and facilitating communication between respective constituent institutions. The UNC Transfer Student website, the College Foundation of North Carolina, and published baccalaureate degree plans (BDPs) from each university provide access to details that students need to make informed choices when selecting institutions, degree programs, and courses. Online data dashboards containing transfer information for each community college and university, as well as aggregate information for the two systems, improves transparency and accountability through public access to transfer and performance data. Both systems of public higher education in the state of North Carolina continue to work together to develop and support degree-mapping tools to facilitate informed and efficient transfer.

This report summarizes ongoing efforts to implement and fulfill the *CAA*. The TAC is committed to providing students and institutions with information and strategies to support both associate degree and baccalaureate degree completion.

The most recent version of the 2014 *CAA*, complete with appendices, is available at https://myapps.northcarolina.edu/transfertoolbox/download/5/caa/619/caa_2020-tac-approved-08-28-20.pdf

Transfer Enrollment and Performance Data

The UNC System data dashboard provides essential data on transfer students to include enrollment trends, credit hours and degree transfers, graduation rates, grade point average, and performance in disciplines after transfer. Within the dashboard, data for individual community colleges and universities are available for deeper analysis. The UNC System data dashboard continues to be a vital resource in determining whether the 2014 *CAA* is having the desired impact on transfer student success and whether the changes in policy and practice put in place because of the *CAA* and the associated compliance site visits are achieving the desired positive outcomes. This information is critical to the decision-making process for both individual community colleges and universities, as well as for the two systems. Students who entered the NCCCS in fall 2014 and later are under the protections of the 2014 *CAA*, and a significant number continue to transfer to the UNC System as of fall 2021. This large number of transfer students who possess the protections of the 2014 *CAA* and their successful transfer to the state universities give a clear indication of the value of the 2014 *CAA* to students.

Transfer Student Enrollment

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a steady increase in the enrollment of NCCCS transfer students into UNC System institutions. This increase is a clear result of the revised *CAA*, proper advising, and the strong collaboration between the UNC System and the NCCCS. Data from fall 2020 and fall 2021 indicate decreases in associate degree completion among transfer students and in overall transfer enrollment. Since most community college students do not complete their associate degrees in two years, the TAC hopes for increased associate degree completion prior to transfer and in overall transfer enrollment as students, advisors, and institutions continue to gain a better understanding of the protections of the *CAA* and the wide-ranging benefits of degree completion.
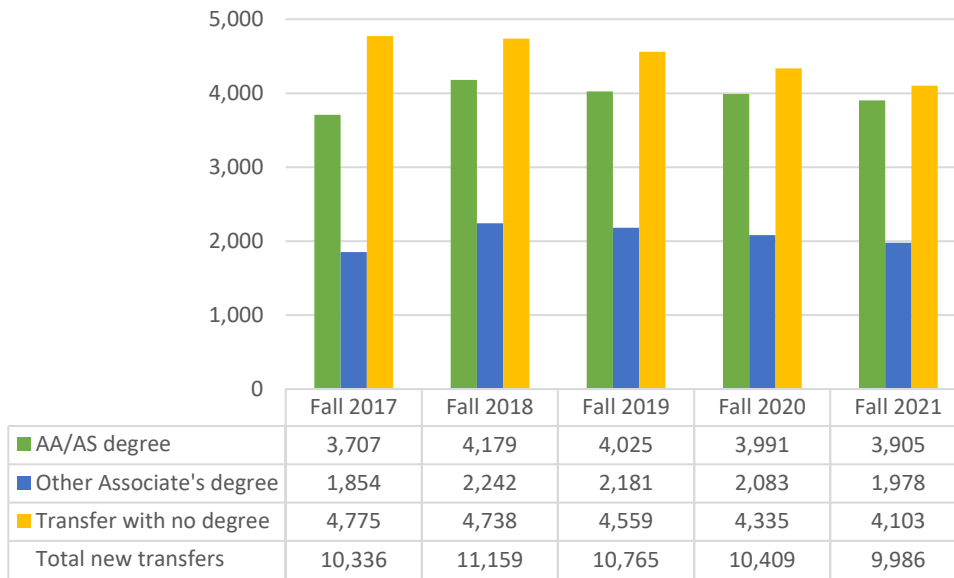
Data illustrate a slight decrease in the number of NCCCS students transferring to the UNC System (see Table 1), down from 10,409 in fall 2020 to 9,986 in fall 2021 (a decrease of 423 students). Considering the impact that COVID-19 continues to have on higher education and our communities, continued enrollment declines are understandable (note that the overall trend since the update of the 2014 *CAA* has been markedly positive).

The number of NCCCS students transferring with a completed associate degree (of any kind) also dropped slightly (see Table 2) during the past year. In fall 2020, the total number of NCCCS students transferring with a completed degree (AA/AS or any other associate degree) was 6,074 compared to 5,883 students in fall 2021. This decrease was seen in students earning an AA/AS degree (down 86 from fall 2020) and in those earning other associate degrees (down 105 from fall 2020).

While the overall numbers of students transferring with completed degrees have increased since 2014, the fall 2021 term marks the third year in a row of declines since the peak in fall 2018. The number of NCCCS students who transfer to UNC System institutions with transfer credit but no degree has also declined. In fall 2017, 4,775 NCCCS students transferred before completing an associate degree compared to 4,103 non-degree-earning students in fall 2021 (see Table 1). This decrease supports the sustained emphasis on degree completion at the community college level prior to transfer to a UNC System institution.
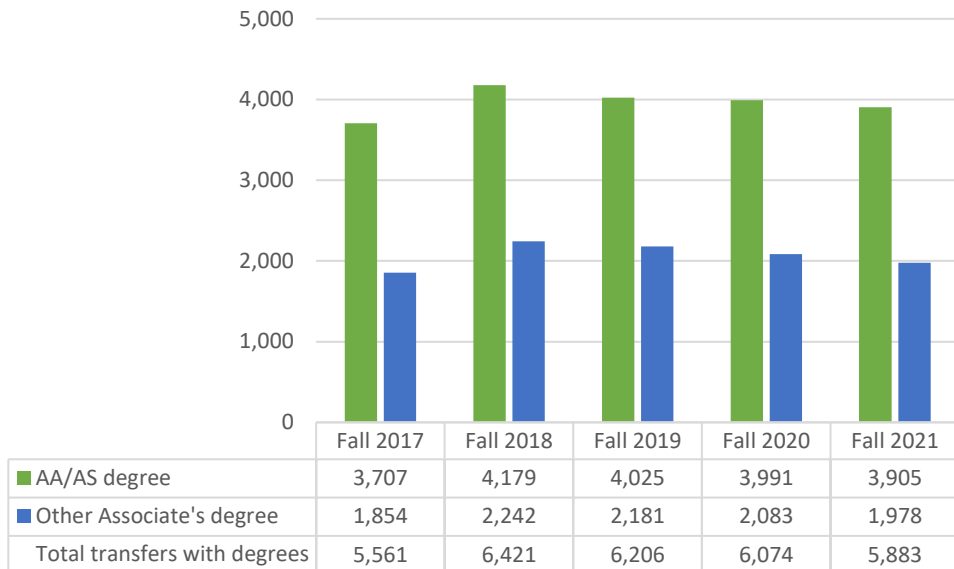
Table 1

New NCCCS Student Enrollment in UNC System Institutions

	Fall 2017	Fall 2018	Fall 2019	Fall 2020	Fall 2021
AA/AS degree	3,707	4,179	4,025	3,991	3,905
Other Associate's degree	1,854	2,242	2,181	2,083	1,978
Transfer with no degree	4,775	4,738	4,559	4,335	4,103
Total new transfers	10,336	11,159	10,765	10,409	9,986

Note: Data within Table 1 include the most current information posted on the UNC public dashboards and may differ slightly from previously reported information.

Table 2

NCCCS Student Transfers with Completed Associate Degree

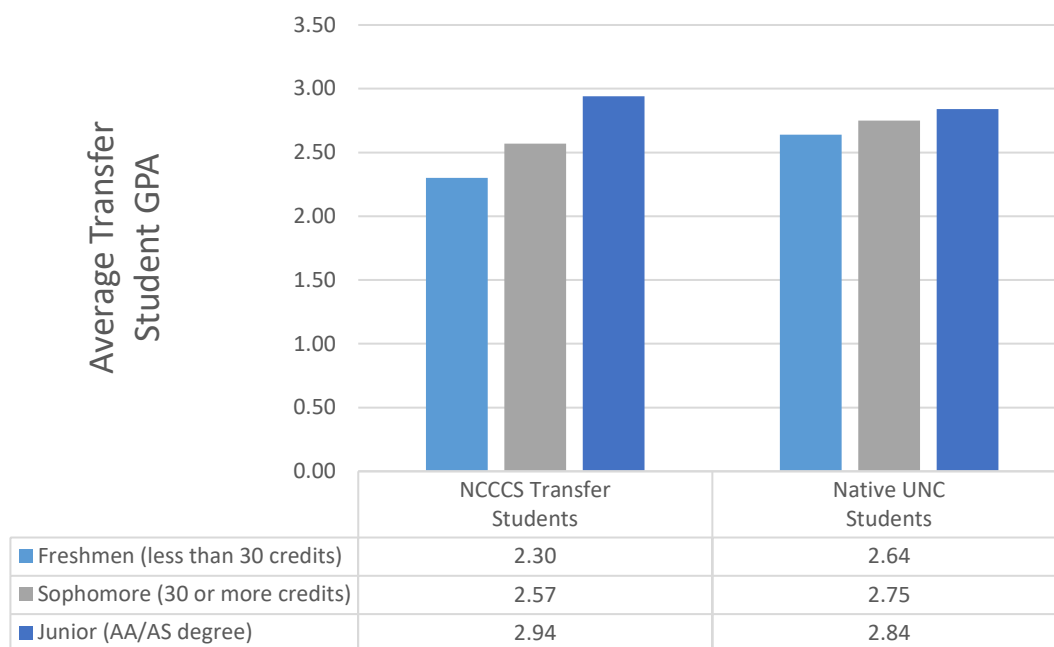|	Fall 2017	Fall 2018	Fall 2019	Fall 2020	Fall 2021
AA/AS degree	3,707	4,179	4,025	3,991	3,905
Other Associate's degree	1,854	2,242	2,181	2,083	1,978
Total transfers with degrees	5,561	6,421	6,206	6,074	5,883

Note: Data within Table 1 include the most current information posted on the UNC public dashboards and may differ slightly from previously reported information.

Transfer Performance Data

The most recent data on transfer student performance (2021-2022 data for students who transferred in fall 2020) continue to indicate a strong correlation between degree and credit-hour completion prior to transfer and academic performance at the university (see Table 3). Students who transferred in fall 2020 from an NCCCS institution into a UNC System institution with fewer than 30 completed credit hours have a lower GPA than those who started at a university as freshmen. This is also true of students who transfer before completing an associate degree but have more than 30 credit hours of transferable coursework: GPA of non-degree-earning transfer students with more than 30 completed hours is lower compared to their UNC System sophomore counterparts who began at the university. Students who completed the associate degree prior to transferring in fall 2020, however, performed better than UNC System juniors who started at the university. These results confirm the foundational principle of the *CAA* that transfer students who complete the associate degree prior to transfer will perform as well as or better than students who began their higher education journeys at UNC System institutions.

Table 3

2021-22 Transfer Student Performance Grade Point Average After First Year

	NCCCS Transfer Students	Native UNC Students
■ Freshmen (less than 30 credits)	2.30	2.64
■ Sophomore (30 or more credits)	2.57	2.75
■ Junior (AA/AS degree)	2.94	2.84

Note: Data indicated are reflective of first-year performance at UNC institutions for transfer students. This measurement was taken during fall 2021 to spring 2022 for the cohort entering in fall 2020.

Campus Compliance Site Visits

In January 2016, the Transfer Advisory Committee (TAC) established a process for reviewing the institutional transfer credit policies and procedures of UNC System institutions once every two years to ensure compliance with the *CAA.* (The North Carolina School of the Arts is not included in the compliance visits because it has very few transfer students). The TAC completed its first round of reviews for the other 15 UNC System institutions in November 2017 (see Table 4). The second round of reviews began in October 2018 and was completed in November 2019. The third round of reviews began in March 2020 and is projected to be completed in December 2021. To date, each institution has been found in compliance with the *CAA* after each site visit review of its policies.

Table 4

Dates of TAC Site Visits to each UNC System Institution

Institution	First-round Visit	Second-round Visit	Third-round Visit
Appalachian State University	07/25/2016	10/18/2018	04/24/2020
East Carolina University	09/15/2016	10/11/2018	10/30/2020
Elizabeth City State University	09/16/2016	10/12/2018	10/29/2020
Fayetteville State University	10/18/2017	10/29/2019	12/16/2021
North Carolina A&T University	03/29/2017	04/30/2019	05/04/2021
North Carolina Central University	11/17/2016	11/28/2018	05/27/2021
North Carolina State University	11/16/2016	11/07/2018	04/26/2021
UNC Asheville	04/17/2017	04/17/2019	06/09/2021
UNC-Chapel Hill	04/05/2017	05/01/2019	04/27/2021
UNC Charlotte	04/13/2016	10/16/2018	04/08/2020
UNC Greensboro	04/14/2016	10/18/2018	03/10/2020
UNC Pembroke	10/18/2017	10/28/2019	01/28/2022
UNC Wilmington	10/20/2017	10/17/2019	11/08/2021
Western Carolina University	04/19/2017	03/28/2019	04/19/2021
Winston-Salem State University	06/23/2016	11/16/2018	05/27/2020

TAC/CAA Campus Site Visit Process and Compliance Feedback Reports

The UNC System sends a *CAA* Review Form to each of the universities at least one month prior to the scheduled site visit. Accompanying this form, the UNC System Office provides data concerning transfer statistics and asks the university to reflect on their observations from these data on the *CAA* Review Form. A site visit team consisting of at least one TAC representative from the NCCCS and at least one TAC representative from the UNC System reviews the forms along with other information from the Data Dashboard and the institution's website to assess transfer student admissions and performance data, completion rates, transfer credits accepted, total credits accumulated upon baccalaureate degree completion, most popular transfer student majors, top feeder community colleges, currency of baccalaureate degree plans (BDPs), and institutional practices. The TAC site visit team then interviews key transfer personnel at the UNC System institution and meets with NCCCS transfer students to hear about their transition experience.

Upon completion of the compliance visit, the site visit team submits feedback reports to the entire TAC for review and approval. The UNC System Office then sends the approved reports to each university provost for distribution to appropriate university personnel. To date, all UNC System institutions have been found to be in compliance with the provisions and guidelines of the *CAA*. TAC members have observed an increased familiarity with the tenets and provisions of the *CAA* now that the third round of site visits have been completed. Furthermore, many UNC System institutions have implemented additional practices to form stronger partnerships with their community college neighbors. For example, several UNC System institutions have developed co-admission or provisional admission programs that allow university advisors the opportunity to work more closely with prospective transfer students. Additionally, several community colleges are offering dedicated space on their campuses for UNC System institution advisors to visit and work with students to be sure they are on a seamless path to transfer.

COVID-19 Impacts on Site Visits

As with so many other institutions and processes, the work of the TAC was disrupted, but not impeded, by the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic. All 2020 and 2021 site visits were held in virtual settings rather than in-person on UNC System campuses. Out of necessity, this has demonstrated that these compliance visits can be held in a virtual setting and have led TAC to explore alternative methods for ensuring compliance with the *CAA*. The one downside to virtual compliance visits has been the lack of significant interaction with NCCCS transfer students, and the TAC is exploring options to enhance these interactions in the future.

In light of the success of the community college transfer survey (see below), the TAC is currently exploring ways to implement a survey method to verify UNC System compliance with the *CAA*. Now that the UNC System institutions are quite familiar with the tenets of the *CAA*, it seems appropriate to explore methods for compliance review that are not as disruptive or demanding of university operations or TAC resources. The implementation of surveys would help offset the time and resources (of both universities and TAC members) needed to implement full on-site compliance visits.

Community College Transfer Survey

Now that three cycles of UNC System site visits have been completed, even though it is not mandated by CAA legislation, the TAC felt it would be beneficial to get a community college perspective on the transfer process, as well. To that end, since it was not feasible to conduct 58 individual site visits, members of the TAC worked to develop and pilot a survey that could be administered to the community colleges on a regular basis to gather feedback on how well the transfer process is working. This survey was deployed to NCCCS institutions during the fall 2021 semester with exceptional response rates (55 out of 58 community colleges completed the survey). The results from the survey have provided additional insight on strengths and weaknesses within the transfer partnership between the two systems and have suggested areas that could be strengthened.

Themes that emerged from the survey responses centered around the following topics: the availability of transfer resources on community college websites, the advising practices employed at community colleges, the course delivery of ACA 122 – College Transfer Success, the use and application of baccalaureate degree plans (BDPs) by students and advisors, the transfer credit appeals process, the training and resources provided to community college employees, the organizational communication present on community college campuses, and the use of data-informed decision-making. Specifically, the creation, availability, format, and use of BDPs was the top opportunity for improvement identified by community college employees as it related to assisting students with a successful transfer process. Community college employees also highlighted needs for transparent communication of transfer policy and greater resources for training of advisors.

Members of TAC have shared these findings and recommendations from the community college transfer survey at various events over the past year. Multiple committee discussions have revolved around these results, and they help inform the recommendations at the end of this report.

Baccalaureate Degree Plans

The 2014 *CAA* requires UNC System institutions to develop and maintain baccalaureate degree plans (BDPs) to outline community college and university courses that lead to timely baccalaureate degree completion for each major plan of study that the university offers. While there remain varied approaches for maintaining these BDPs, more institutions are centralizing the responsibility for BDP maintenance in hopes of creating consistent and accurate BDPs while also being able to respond to course and program updates in a timely manner. The community college transfer survey revealed just how important these plans are for students planning to transfer. With the advent of recent research on the efficacy of these plans and with students clearly seeking them out and attempting to follow them, the time seems ripe for upgrading these BDPs to a standardized template, one that students can become familiar with and understand no matter to which institution they plan to transfer. Thus, a standardized BDP template is one of the recommendations TAC will highlight at the end of this report.

CAA Revisions

This year, the following five new courses were added to the Pre-major/Elective transfer course list:

- ENG 127 – Fiction Writing
- ENG 128 – Poetry Writing
- ENG 129 – Creative Nonfiction Writing
- TEX 110 – Fundamentals of Textiles
- TEX 210 – Fiber Science

These additions to the *CAA* were presented to appropriate personnel in both systems, with the expectation that BDPs will continue to be updated to reflect these changes in the next academic term.

UNC System Common Numbering System

The UNC System has undertaken the creation of a common numbering system for lower division courses which should further alleviate transfer issues between the two systems of higher education. The searchable database of course equivalencies was just released during fall 2022. While not directly tied to the work of the TAC, the efforts on these fronts have involved various TAC members, and they were kept abreast of the progress from UNC System representatives.

Data Sharing and Equity

The TAC has approached both system offices regarding the possibility of implementing seamless data sharing between the two systems. This technology solution could interact with student records in both systems and assign university credit automatically without the need for regular human interaction and manual evaluation of transcripts. Such a system may require a substantial initial investment, but it would position colleges to repurpose personnel from data-processing to coaching transfer students, would facilitate curriculum alignment, and would maximize the common numbering systems now present within both systems. Additionally, as more detailed demographic information is added to the UNC System data dashboard, the TAC will be able to identify inequities within the transfer process to help facilitate important equity-related conversations.

Communication

Personnel at institutions from both systems have clamored for additional information related to transfer. Thus, the TAC will partner with both system offices to send out regular communication to all transfer-related personnel at each public institution of higher education in North Carolina. These communiques may be sent in the form of numbered memos or regular newsletters and relay important changes in policy, procedure, and interpretation.

Funding for TAC

Since its inception, the TAC has relied upon the home institutions of its members to fund member participation in TAC meetings, compliance site visits, and presentations at professional conferences or workshops. The TAC is intentionally comprised of members from across the state from both urban and rural areas and representing both large and small institutions. Unfortunately, the travel costs associated with the duties and responsibilities of membership place an additional financial obligation on institutions that have already existing significant constraints and limitations on their spending. The NCCCS and the UNC System Offices both strongly advise that funding be allocated to provide for travel to TAC meetings, site visits, and professional presentations – all of which support the mission of increased transfer efficiency and effectiveness – for each of the members of the TAC.

Conclusion and TAC Recommendations

In the past eight years, NCCCS and UNC System institutions have made steady progress toward seamless transfer. They continue to perfect and improve their partnerships to provide more effective advising, clear and consistent communication, and ongoing support to transfer students. As awareness and execution of the 2014 *Comprehensive Articulation Agreement* increase in North Carolina, more students are completing associate degrees at community colleges and transferring to UNC System institutions. Upon transfer, these degree-completers are performing comparably with students who started as freshmen at those same universities. The data provided in this report demonstrate that UNC System institutions are not only meeting the expectations set out in the *CAA,* but they are finding creative ways to enhance the transfer process and to champion transfer student success. In light of this positive momentum, the TAC continues to promote ongoing support of the following efforts:

- Implementing templates for baccalaureate degree plans (BDPs) that would be recognizable and easy-to-follow for all students, no matter the eventual transfer destination;

- Technological and operational solutions that create greater continuity, clarity, accessibility, and transparency for advising and the processing of transfer students and informing course, program, and institution selection among the NCCCS and UNC System institutions, particularly through the implementation of statewide data sharing between the two systems;

- An examination of policies and procedures as they relate to issues involving diversity, equity, and inclusivity among NCCCS and UNC System transfer students, with the objective of promoting equitable outcomes to ameliorate any deficiencies; and

- Continuing collaborations with other key partners (e.g., NCSU's Belk Center for Community College Leadership and Research, myFutureNC, North Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities, etc.) in the work of transfer success.