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, 2023

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, 2023

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 *CAA*, complete with appendices, is available here:

https://myapps.northcarolina.edu/transfertoolbox/download/5/caa/684/comprehensive-articulation-agreement_2022_updated.pdf

CAA PROGRESS – 2022-23

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 *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 *CAA*, and a significant number continue to transfer to the UNC System as of the Fall 2022 semester. This large number of transfer students who possess the protections of the *CAA* and their successful transfer to the state universities give a clear indication of the value of the *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 the last three years show overall decreases in associate degree attainment and overall transfer enrollment. As we progress through the post-pandemic era, institutions must deal with significant employee turnover and students who did their best to navigate college through the pandemic. Both conditions contribute to a decrease in knowledge about the CAA and serve as a reminder that college employees and students need additional support to see returns to pre-pandemic degree completion and transfer numbers.
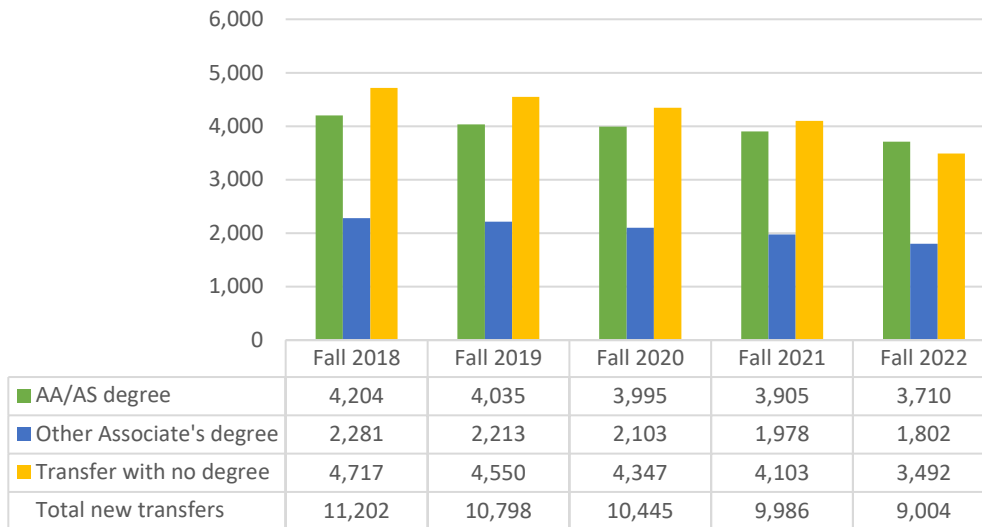
Data illustrate a slight decrease in the number of NCCCS students transferring to the UNC System (see Table 1), down from 9,986 in the Fall 2021 semester to 9,004 in the Fall 2022 semester (a decrease of 982 students). Considering the impact that COVID-19 continues to have on higher education and our communities, continued enrollment declines are understandable.

The number of NCCCS students transferring with a completed associate degree (of any kind) also dropped slightly (see Table 2) during the past year. During the Fall 2021 semester, the total number of NCCCS students transferring with a completed degree (AA/AS or any other associate degree) was 5,883 compared with 5,512 in the Fall 2022 semester. This decrease was seen in students earning an AA/AS degree (down 195 from Fall 2021) and in those earning other associate degrees (down 176 from Fall 2021).

While the overall numbers of students transferring with completed degrees have increased since 2014, the Fall 2022 semester marks the fourth year in a row of declines since the peak in the Fall 2018 semester. The number of NCCCS students who transfer to UNC System institutions with transfer credit but no degree has also declined. During the Fall 2018 semester, 4,717 NCCCS students transferred before completing an associate degree compared to 3,492 from the Fall 2022 semester (see Table 1).
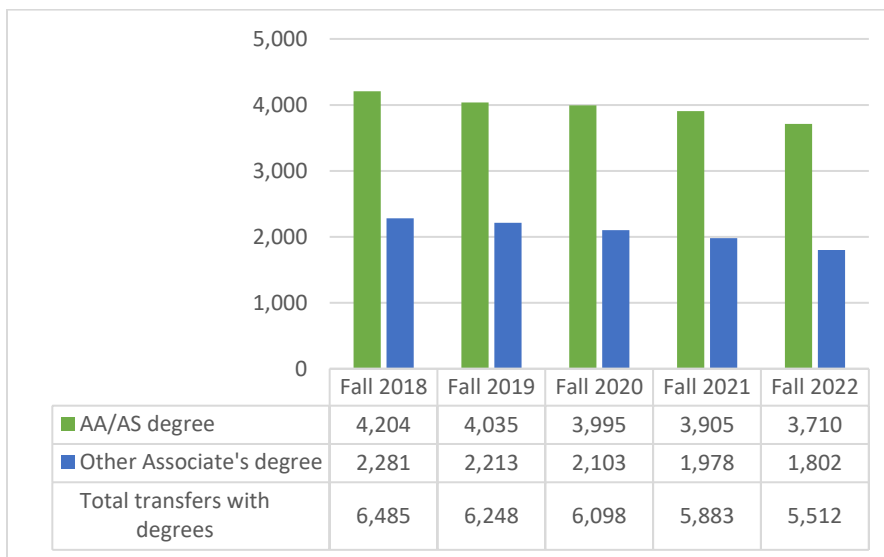
Table 1

New NCCCS Student Enrollment in UNC System Institutions

	Fall 2018	Fall 2019	Fall 2020	Fall 2021	Fall 2022
AA/AS degree	4,204	4,035	3,995	3,905	3,710
Other Associate's degree	2,281	2,213	2,103	1,978	1,802
Transfer with no degree	4,717	4,550	4,347	4,103	3,492
Total new transfers	11,202	10,798	10,445	9,986	9,004

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

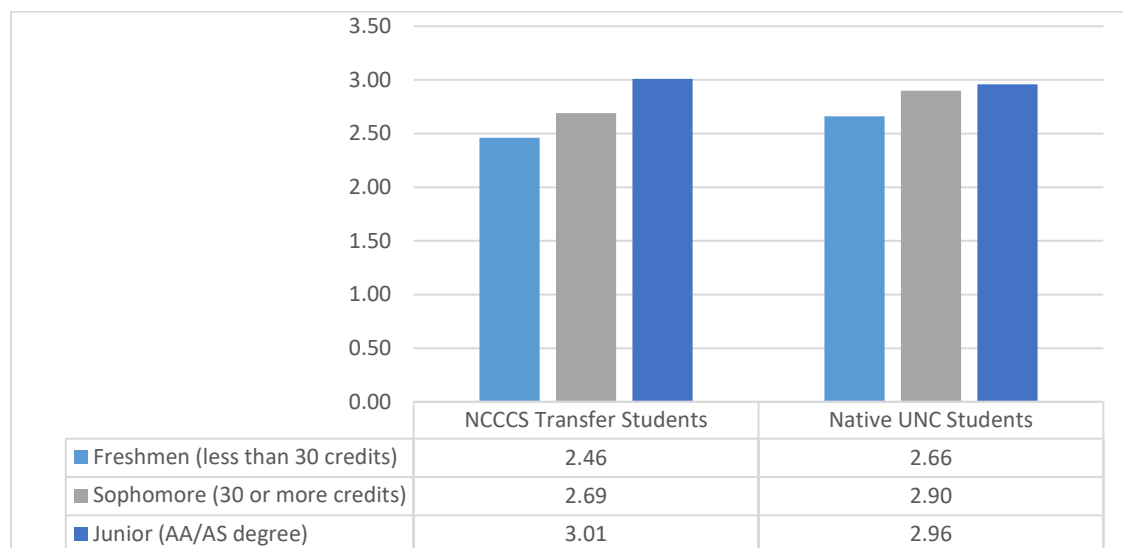|	Fall 2018	Fall 2019	Fall 2020	Fall 2021	Fall 2022
AA/AS degree	4,204	4,035	3,995	3,905	3,710
Other Associate's degree	2,281	2,213	2,103	1,978	1,802
Total transfers with degrees	6,485	6,248	6,098	5,883	5,512

Note: Data within Table 2 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 (2022-2023 data for students who transferred in the Fall 2021 semester) 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 the Fall 2021 semester 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 upon transferring in the Fall 2021 semester, 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

2022-23 Transfer Student Performance Grade Point Average After First Year

	NCCCS Transfer Students	Native UNC Students
■ Freshmen (less than 30 credits)	2.46	2.66
■ Sophomore (30 or more credits)	2.69	2.90
■ Junior (AA/AS degree)	3.01	2.96

Note: Data indicated are reflective of first-year performance at UNC institutions for transfer students. This measurement was taken during fall 2022 to spring 2023 for the cohort entering in fall 2021.

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 was not included in the compliance visits because it has very few transfer students). Since 2016, the TAC has completed three rounds of reviews with each UNC System institution using a combination of virtual and in-person visits. To date, each institution has been found in compliance with the *CAA* after each site visit review of its policies.

Because of the success of the first three rounds of site visits and the success of a recent transfer survey administered to all NCCCS institutions, the TAC has created a survey for UNC System institutions to complete the fourth round of compliance review. This survey will be administered during the Fall 2023 semester and provide the TAC with updated information on transfer processes at each UNC System institution. In addition to the institution survey, the TAC will seek feedback on the student experience of transfer through a separate survey administered directly to students on UNC System campuses.

Baccalaureate Degree Plans

The *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 have centralized 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 2022 community college transfer survey revealed just how important these plans are for students planning to transfer, and the 2022 legislative report on transfer recommended that a template be developed to be used by all UNC System institutions. Since that point, the UNC System Office has gathered feedback from many different stakeholders (e.g., university and community college advisors and students) and developed a standardized template to be used by all institutions going forward. This template will be rolled out to the universities during the Fall 2023 semester.

CAA Revisions

This year, the following three courses were added to the Universal General Education Transfer Component (UGETC) course list:

- AST 152 – General Astronomy II
- AST 152A – General Astronomy II Lab
- MAT 175 – Precalculus

These changes in *CAA* course status approved by appropriate personnel in both systems, with the expectation that BDPs will continue to be updated to reflect these changes in the next academic term.

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.

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 lack of such supporting funds may prohibit some institutions from allowing their employees to participate in this important work. 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 nine 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 *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:

- 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;

- A more unified approach to transfer, where the TAC not only provides input on issues related to the *CAA* but also any on others related to the successful transfer between the public and private two- and four-year institutions in the state;

- A website and/or mobile application that allows students to see how credit earned at one institution would be counted at another – a true degree audit for transfer credit;

- Additional training for community college and university employees on the benefits and guarantees of the *CAA*; 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.