**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, 2024

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, 2024

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 to 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. The Transfer Advisory Committee (TAC) has completed four full rounds of compliance visits to UNC System institutions.

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. Both public higher education systems in North Carolina continue to work together to develop and support degree-mapping tools, improved policies, and professional development opportunities 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://www.northcarolina.edu/wp-content/uploads/reports-and-documents/academic-affairs/caa-oct.-2022.pdf

Transfer Enrollment and Performance Data
The UNC System data dashboard provides essential data on transfer students including 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 individual community colleges and universities and 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 2023 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. Similarly, the North Carolina Community College System Office provides data dashboards to report on community college transfer performance, in addition to enrollment and graduation data. Both data dashboards provide comprehensive and timely information on transfer student access, success, and transitions between institutions.
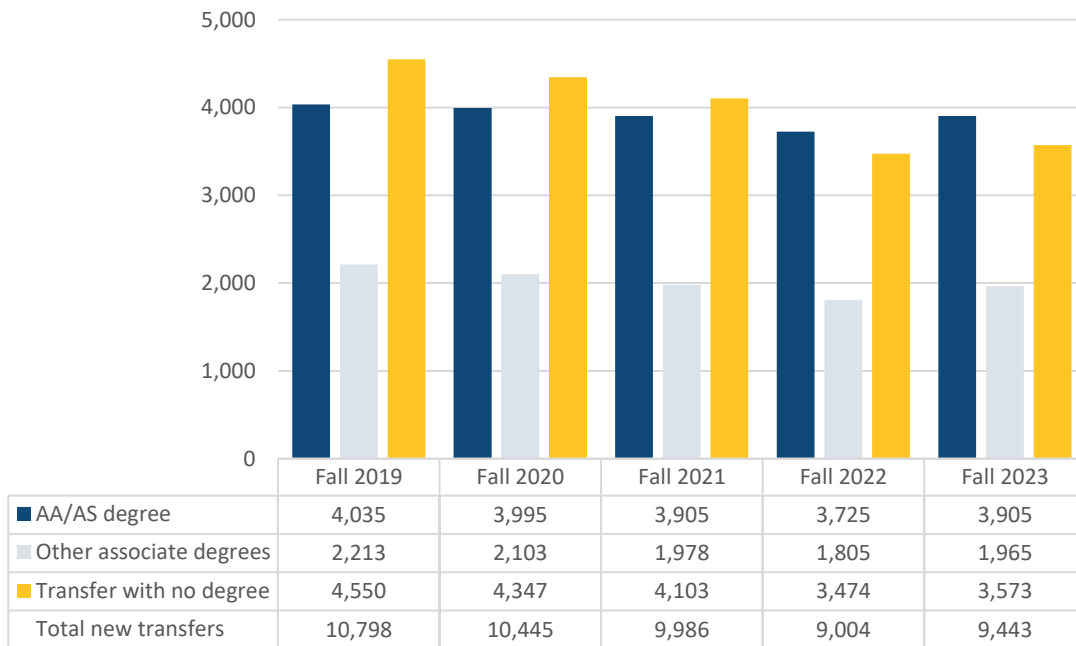
Transfer Student Enrollment
Before the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a steady increase in enrollment of NCCCS transfer students into UNC System institutions. This increase is a clear result of the revised *CAA*, proper advising, and the strong collaboration between the UNC System and the NCCCS. Data from the last four years show an overall decrease in associate degree attainment and transfer enrollment when compared to Fall 2019. Institutions continue to 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 an increase in the number of NCCCS students transferring to the UNC System (see Table 1), up from 9,004 in the Fall 2022 semester to 9,443 in the Fall 2023 semester. This marks the first increase in total transfer students since 2018. The number of NCCCS students transferring with a completed associate degree (of any kind) increased (see Table 2) in Fall 2023. During the Fall 2023 semester, the total number of NCCCS students transferring with a completed degree (AA/AS or any other associate degree) was 5,870 compared with 5,530 in the Fall 2022 semester.
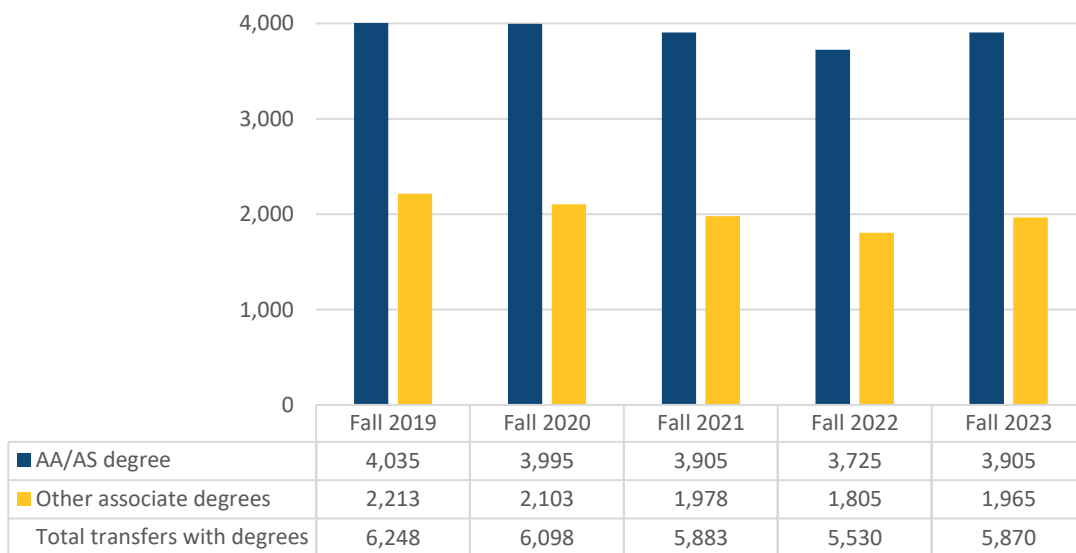
While the overall numbers of students transferring with completed degrees have increased since 2014, there were four years of declining enrollment before the Fall 2023 increase. With community college enrollments recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic and seeing enrollment increases, the UNC and NCCC Systems hope to see continued increases in transfer numbers. The number of NCCCS students who transfer to UNC System institutions with transfer credit, but no degree increased slightly from Fall 2022 (3,474) to Fall 2023 (3,573). The Transfer Guide project, detailed later in this report, is one opportunity to encourage community college students to complete their degrees prior to transferring to UNC System institutions.

Table 1
New NCCCS Student Enrollment in UNC System Institutions

	Fall 2019	Fall 2020	Fall 2021	Fall 2022	Fall 2023
■ AA/AS degree	4,035	3,995	3,905	3,725	3,905
■ Other associate degrees	2,213	2,103	1,978	1,805	1,965
■ Transfer with no degree	4,550	4,347	4,103	3,474	3,573
Total new transfers	10,798	10,445	9,986	9,004	9,443

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 Degrees

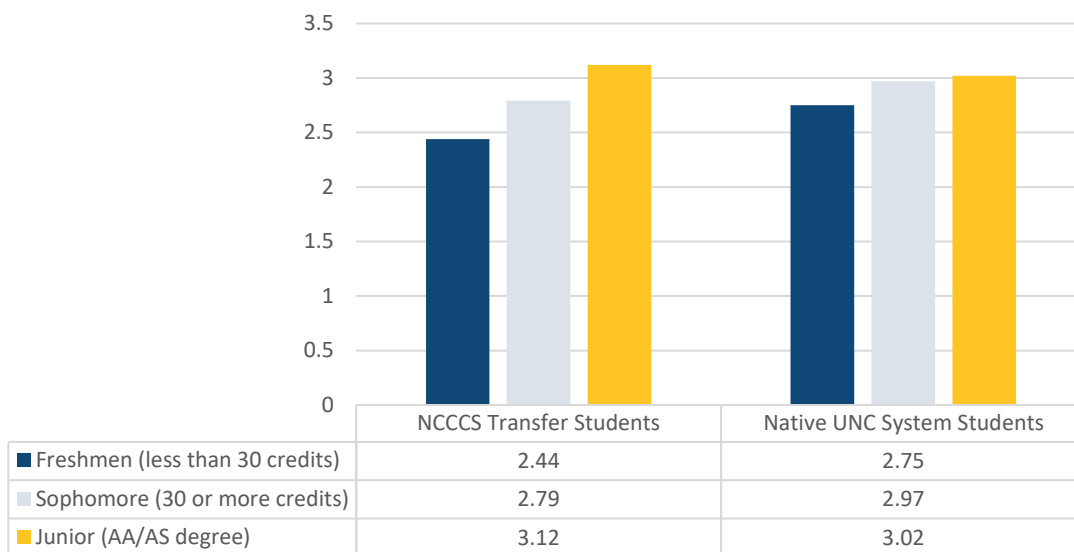|	Fall 2019	Fall 2020	Fall 2021	Fall 2022	Fall 2023
■ AA/AS degree	4,035	3,995	3,905	3,725	3,905
■ Other associate degrees	2,213	2,103	1,978	1,805	1,965
Total transfers with degrees	6,248	6,098	5,883	5,530	5,870

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 (2023-2024 data for students who transferred in the Fall 2022 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 2022 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 2022 semester, however, performed better than UNC System juniors who started at the university as freshmen. 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
2023-24 Transfer Student Grade Point Average After First Year

	NCCCS Transfer Students	Native UNC System Students
■ Freshmen (less than 30 credits)	2.44	2.75
■ Sophomore (30 or more credits)	2.79	2.97
■ Junior (AA/AS degree)	3.12	3.02

Note: Data indicated are reflective of first-year performance at UNC institutions for transfer students. This measurement was taken during fall 2023 to spring 2024 for the cohort entering in fall 2022.

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 four rounds of reviews with each UNC System institution using a combination of virtual and in-person visits.

Because of the success of the first three rounds of site visits and the success of a recent transfer survey TAC administered to all NCCCS institutions, the TAC created a survey for UNC System institutions to complete the fourth round of compliance review. This survey was administered during the Fall 2023 semester and provided the TAC with updated information on transfer processes at each UNC System institution. The surveys were tremendously successful and allowed TAC to review all universities at the same time.

During this survey review, North Carolina Central University was initially found to be out of compliance, due to baccalaureate degree plans (BDPs) not being available online since 2021. This has since been remedied thanks to the new Transfer Guide process, detailed in the next section. All other universities were fully compliant with the regulations and practices laid out in the *CAA*.

In addition to the institutional survey, the TAC sought feedback on the student experience of transfer through a separate survey administered directly to students on UNC System campuses. Over 2,700 students responded to the survey and provided valuable insights into their transfer experiences. From the survey, the following themes emerged:

- Students lack clarity regarding which credits will or will not transfer and for which requirements.
- Students are often on their own to identify BDPs and how to use them in planning courses and transfer pathways.
- Students exhibited minimal knowledge of the *CAA*, the guarantees it offers, and related transfer policies.
- There is a lack of communication between community college and university advisors.
- There are challenges navigating the cultural and social transition between community colleges and transfer universities.

The TAC is dedicated to working on solutions for students and institutions to ameliorate these and other barriers to successful transfer.

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. Since 2014, UNC System institutions have created and maintained BDPs based on best practices developed at each institution. While this has been largely supportive of transfer students, the TAC began reviewing concerns with the utility, timeliness, maintenance, and accuracy of BDPs in 2021. Since then, more than 2,500 students, faculty, and staff have participated in surveys and focus groups expressing various opinions regarding BDPs.

In collaboration with many teams in the UNC System Office and across multiple institutions, a new process was created to streamline data input, to improve the student-facing version, and to identify a centralized process for creating and storing the BDPs. The first step was to evolve the language

describing these plans and standardize the format. BDPs are now called Transfer Guides and were developed and designed by UNC System Office staff in the departments of IT, Program Management, and Academic Affairs in close collaboration with the TAC and hundreds of students, staff, faculty, and administrators across the state.

The TAC is thrilled to see nearly 1,400 updated documents online and available to the public (1) on university websites and (2) on a centralized platform hosted by our close collaborators, College For North Carolina (CFNC). All Transfer Guides can be accessed at: www.cfnc.org/transferguides. Having Transfer Guides located on a neutral, institution-agnostic website is the culmination of recommendations from all active transfer advisory committees, two statewide/multi-sector transfer taskforces, and hundreds of individuals hoping to have a streamlined location for transfer information. More content for that central repository is forthcoming and the TAC will update the *CAA* later in the fall to include the new Transfer Guide details.

CAA Revisions
This year, the following three courses were added to the pre-major/elective transfer course list:

- DRA 118 – Script Analysis
- DRA 144 – Introduction to Stage Design
- HSE 110 – Intro to Human Services

These changes in *CAA* course status were approved by appropriate personnel in both systems, with the expectation that Transfer Guides will be updated to reflect these changes in the next academic term. Additionally, the process for students submitting concerns regarding transfer credit that has been a part of the *CAA* since its inception has been updated. A new online tool, the Transfer Student and Credit Appeal portal has been created with support from the UNC System Office and will be available during the fall 2024 semester. This completely online tool replaces the previous version that required students to mail copies of their complaints to the UNC System Office who then shared them with the TAC. This new tool will allow TAC members to receive updates and render decisions completely online, removing the need to maintain separate tracking systems. The publicly available website is hosted by the UNC System Office and can be accessed here: https://transferappeal.northcarolina.edu/.

 This new process will be updated in the *CAA* later in the fall and will coincide with proposed requirements for all UNC System institutions to create an online appeals process to expedite student requests and concerns.

Data Sharing and Student Access
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 will 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.

Both system offices are supportive of this type of program, and steps are in place to determine a pilot project. 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 access-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. An initial budget request would be approximately $7,500 to reduce the costs for the individual TAC members and their institutions.

Conclusion and TAC Recommendations
In the past ten 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. Considering this positive momentum, the TAC recommends the following efforts to continue to provide and improve support for transfer across the state:

- 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.
- After reviewing student survey responses and comprehensive transfer data, the TAC would like to initiate discussions with other transfer stakeholders regarding expanding the scope of TAC to provide the same review service, support, and reporting to other uniform articulation agreements between the UNC and NCCCS systems.
- 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*.
- 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.