Implementing state transfer policies: A case study of Virginia's state *policy on transfer

Lonnie J. Schaffer

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IMPLEMENTING STATE TRANSFER POLICIES:
A CASE STUDY OF VIRGINIA’S STATE POLICY ON TRANSFER

A Dissertation
Presented to
The Faculty of the School of Education
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

By
Lonnie J. Schaffer

May 2000
IMPLEMENTING STATE TRANSFER POLICIES:
A CASE STUDY OF VIRGINIA'S STATE POLICY ON TRANSFER

by

Lonnie J. Schaffer

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## CHAPTER 1: STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of Transfer as a Public Policy Issue</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Approaches to Transfer Policies</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy-oriented Research on Transfer and Articulation</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of the Problem</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Case Study in Policy Implementation</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations and Delimitations</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definitions of Terms</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Transfer Function</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Taxonomy for Guiding the Literature Review</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical Foundations for Transfer Policy</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Policy Issues in Transfer</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring Transfer—How States Have Responded</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy Evaluation—What Works</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Theoretical Framework for Examining Transfer Policy</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A History of Transfer in Virginia</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Statement of Bias</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approaches to the Study of the State Transfer Policy</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using a Collective Case Study Approach to Policy Inquiry</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selection Criteria for the Cases</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sources of Data</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS OF RESULTS FOR PAIRED COMMUNITY COLLEGES AND FOUR-YEAR INSTITUTIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Virginia Community College A</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia Four-year Institution A</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia Community College B</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia Four-year Institution B</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia Community College C</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia Four-year Institution C</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia Community College D</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia Four-year Institution D</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia Community College E</td>
<td>194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia Four-year Institution E</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table 1</td>
<td>Policy Types and Definitions</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2</td>
<td>Major Components of SREB State Transfer Policies</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3</td>
<td>Summary of Study Methodology</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4</td>
<td>Selection of Respondents for College Interviews</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 5</td>
<td>Institutional Definitions of Policy</td>
<td>227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 6</td>
<td>Summary of Major Themes Related to Previous Research</td>
<td>236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 7</td>
<td>Summary of Additional Themes</td>
<td>254</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1</td>
<td>Top-down Approach to Policy Studies</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2</td>
<td>Implementation Model for Virginia's State Policy on Transfer</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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IMPLEMENTING STATE TRANSFER POLICIES:
A CASE STUDY OF VIRGINIA'S STATE POLICY ON TRANSFER

ABSTRACT

Using a collective case study methodology, this policy-oriented research examined how Virginia’s state policy on transfer has been implemented at selected public colleges and universities. A conceptual framework of policy definitions was used to examine how the policy is understood in various contexts and what the policy’s effects have been at the campus level.

Based on quantitative transfer data, five community colleges and four state universities were selected for study. The cases captured a wide range of transfer activity and college characteristics with the expectation that different understandings of the policy would produce different effects. How colleges defined the policy and assessed the policy’s effectiveness was inferred from campus interviews and the institutions’ transfer-related documents.

Results supported previous research findings that transfer activity is closely related to institutional culture and the climate for higher education in the state. Results also demonstrated that policy implementation is an interactive and iterative process that enables policy to support many meanings. Thus, in spite of a uniform state policy, Virginia’s transfer policy is not one, but many.
Further study is needed into how policy is implemented and its effects in states with more prescriptive transfer policies. Research is also needed into the effects of market forces on transfer activity. Finally, this policy study demonstrated that transfer is no longer a linear process of students moving from two- to four-year institutions, suggesting that alternative models of student progression should be explored.

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PROGRAM: HIGHER EDUCATION

THE COLLEGE OF WILLIAM AND MARY IN VIRGINIA
IMPLEMENTING STATE TRANSFER POLICIES:
A CASE STUDY OF VIRGINIA'S STATE POLICY ON TRANSFER
CHAPTER 1: STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Over the past decade, state-level policies have provided evidence of a changing climate for higher education in Virginia. Assessment mandates, performance measures, and a statewide transfer policy have been imposed on public institutions to ensure access, quality, and efficiency in post-secondary education. The purpose of this case study of Virginia’s State Policy on Transfer was to understand the complexity of implementing state-level policies for higher education at Virginia’s public institutions.

Policy studies are often used to justify policy decisions, to find an expedient way to resolve an issue, or to delay action on a problem until interest wanes in the face of more pressing political concerns. The purpose of this policy-oriented study, however, was to contribute to a knowledge base for better policy-making by examining how policy is understood by those who have to implement it, and how those understandings affect the way policy is implemented. The intent was not policy analysis or evaluation; nor was it to examine the policy-making process. The focus of this study was policy implementation as a dynamic, interactive and iterative process that actually shapes policy itself. The study examined obstacles to policy implementation and sought evidence of a theoretical context for the results.

Very simply, a top-down approach to policy studies might be diagrammed as follows. Policy-making and policy evaluation studies might follow this model.
But Figure 2 illustrates a more complex model for understanding policy implementation. The area labeled "negotiations" highlights the focus of this case study of transfer policy. Policy implementation is shown as an iterative process of negotiations over the meaning of policy, and shared policy definitions are shown as the link between policy-making and policy implementation—how do institutions understand and implement the policy? How do those understandings, or policy definitions, affect policy outcomes?

Guba's (1984) conceptual framework of policy types and definitions (Table 1) provided the context for examining what the state policy on transfer looked like at various institutions. According to Guba, "varying interpretations of the word "policy" greatly affect how and where particular policies are created and implemented and
FIGURE 2: Implementation Model for Virginia's State Policy on Transfer

Knowledge of Social, Political, Ethical Consequences of Policy

Resources to Enforce Policy

Formulation and Communication of Policy

Negotiations

Compliance or Avoidance of Policy

Student Transfer Activity Intended and Unintended Outcomes

Public Interests Intended and Unintended Outcomes

Institutional Culture

Values

Resources to Implement Policy

Policy Definitions

Goal Consensus

Policy Definitions
ultimately, whether their results are as intended” (p. 63).

Guba’s first policy type, “policy-in-intention,” defines policy in terms of its intended purposes as goals to be achieved, rules for decision-making, guidelines for policy implementation, or as strategies to be used in problem-solving. In terms of this case study, those who defined policy as “intention” used terms such as “the institution will…” or “the student can…” Those who viewed the policy as effective were expected to define it as policy-in-intention—institutions that were in compliance with the policy, followed the rules and solved transfer problems guided by the policy.

Institutions that viewed the policy as somewhat successful were expected to define the policy as “policy-in-action,” or what the student should expect as a result of the policy. Statements such as “the student should expect to…” or “the institution is allowed to…” defined the policy in terms of approved behavior, norms of conduct, and policy effects of transfer practices. Policy looked like expectations rather than results.

Finally, Guba (1984) described “policy-in-experience” as “constructions based on experience.” Policy in this case was defined in terms of what actually happens or what the student experiences. For example, if students observed that those who finished the associate degree were admitted to four-year colleges, the student might understand the policy as guaranteeing admission to all associate degree graduates. The policy is thus defined based on experience. Because of the possible lack of consistency in student experiences with the policy, policy defined in terms of experience was expected to be viewed as less effective than Guba’s other policy types.

To answer the question of how institutions interpret transfer policy in Virginia, this study
Table 1. Policy Types and Definitions for Eight Definitions of *Policy*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy Types</th>
<th>Definition of Policy</th>
<th>Proximity to Point of Action</th>
<th>Policy Looks Like</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Policy-in-intention</td>
<td>1. Goals or intents</td>
<td>Distant</td>
<td>Ends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Standing decisions</td>
<td>Intermediate</td>
<td>Rules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Problem-solving strategy</td>
<td>Intermediate</td>
<td>Sets of tactics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy-in-action</td>
<td>5. Sanctioned behavior</td>
<td>Close</td>
<td>Expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. Norms of conduct</td>
<td>Close</td>
<td>Norms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7. Output of the policy-making system</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Effects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy-in-experience</td>
<td>8. Constructions based on experience</td>
<td>Inside</td>
<td>Encounters</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from Guba (1984), page 65
used a collective case study design. Five community colleges were selected from the state’s system of twenty-three colleges to provide a broad spectrum on the way policy is implemented. Using transfer activity as the criterion, typical cases and cases that demonstrated an unusual characteristic were selected to look at the diversity in patterns of transfer activity and examine ways in which the policy was understood and implemented. Four public four-year institutions were also selected for the study— institutions to which most of the two-year colleges’ students transferred. Policy meaning was examined in the context of Guba’s (1984) policy types and definitions for each institution and across all institutions examined.

In this study, policy implementation was examined as a dynamic process of communicating, understanding, and responding to policy. The study looked at understandings, not measurements; patterns, not correlation; and themes, rather than cause and effect. In a sense, state policy was viewed as both a dependent and an independent variable. How is policy defined or understood in various contexts (dependent)? What effect does the policy have on transfer at the institution (independent)? To answer these questions, an interpretive and descriptive approach was used in a case study of Virginia’s State Policy on Transfer. The significance of policy-oriented research for higher education is addressed in the following section.

Significance of Transfer as a Public Policy Issue

According to the National Center for Public Policy in Higher Education, “the policies of state government have historically been the foremost device for ‘steering’ higher education in the U.S.” (Challenges and Opportunities, 1998, p.4). But state legislators and academic leaders have not always agreed on the significant issues for
higher education or on how those issues should be resolved. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, increasing state involvement and changes effected by governing and coordinating boards have become key issues of concern in the governance, management, and leadership of American institutions of higher education (Berdahl, 1987; Fincher, 1987). Primarily because of rising costs, minority access and affirmative action, and perceptions of declining quality in undergraduate education, the state's role in higher education has become a serious topic of discussion by state politicians, scholars, and practitioners (Bender, 1990; Hines, 1988). Although Berdahl and McConnell (1994) saw no immediate threat from legislatures to faculty's and student's intellectual freedom, they acknowledged steady erosion of institutional autonomy resulting from increased public demands for accountability. In a wave of reforms over the past decade, colleges and universities are being held more accountable to the citizens who support them (Carnevale, et al, 1998).

Accountability has been translated into various public policies primarily designed to balance quality, diversity, and budgetary efficiency (Finifter, Baldwin, & Thelin, 1991). In recent years, legislatures have addressed issues of quality and access in higher education by mandating policies focused on improving student outcomes, reducing the need for remediation, and monitoring performance indicators for funding purposes (Carnevale, et al, 1998; Marchese, 1998). Capping tuition and fees, finding new sources for student financial aid, and "cutting the fat" from higher education budgets through restructuring also have been used by states to address the issue of rising costs (Mercer, 1992; Schmidt, 1997). And in another move to balance quality, access, and efficiency, many states have initiated statewide transfer and articulation policies to encourage
students to begin their education at lower-cost community colleges (Mercer, 1992; Schmidt, 1997). According to Bender (1990), “nearly every state can certify it has a policy statement on transfer of credit for students moving from two-year to four-year institutions” (p. 8).

Although transfer itself has been a long-standing issue in the history and mission of community colleges, state-level policies on transfer and articulation are relatively new (Bender, 1990; Knoell, 1990). A segment of community college students have always sought to move from the two-year college to a four-year college without loss of credit and with the expectation they would be treated equitably with other students (Bender, 1990). But in the 1980s, the literature pointed to evidence of a decline in the transfer function of community colleges, citing decreased enrollments in the liberal arts and increased enrollments in vocational programs (Barkley, 1993; Kissler, 1982; Knoell, 1982). Using data from a longitudinal study of 1972 and 1980 high school graduates in the United States, Grubb (1991) found decreasing numbers of associate degree graduates who transferred into baccalaureate programs. And as late as 1998, Perkins argued that transfer now plays a less significant role in community colleges because of the increased importance of workforce development in the mission of community colleges.

Arguing the collegiate function of community college is the most compelling, Dougherty (1994) described the community college as being in a state of crisis.

The community college is in crisis. Strong empirical evidence backs up the claim that its many baccalaureate aspirants are significantly hindered in their pursuit of a bachelor's degree by the fact of entering a community college rather than a four-year college. But if the crisis of the community college is clear, the solutions
are less obvious (Dougherty, 1994, p. 269).

But the extent of transfer activity from two-year to four-year institutions is unknown because of problems in defining and identifying transfer students (Bender, 1990; Cohen, 1987; Knoell, 1990; Perkins, 1998). Barkley (1993) noted that more students are transferring without the degree or with a vocational degree, which traditionally has not been intended to transfer. And according to Creech (1995b) of the Southern Regional Education Board, transfer has become a “front burner” issue in the 1990s. “Creech noted that public policy cannot ignore the fact that a large proportion of students attend more than one institution over their post-secondary careers, and in the process, often face anything but a seamless transfer process” (SHEEO, 1999, p. 5).

Transfer and articulation issues are directly related to issues of teacher shortages and the quality of teacher preparation, workforce development, effectiveness and accountability, access and diversity, and overall student costs—issues that rank in the top ten concerns of State Higher Education Executive Officers (SHEEO) according to a 1999 survey of state governing and coordinating boards. Transfer rates have become one of the benchmarks for accountability in state funding. “Many legislators believe poor transfer and graduation rates are caused by students who lose ground because their credits do not transfer” (Mingle, 1997, p. 1). And as Cicarelli (1993) noted, “…lawmakers who seek to help students fulfill their educational aspirations with the least possible time and money may well intervene… If those who manage public institutions cannot solve the articulation problem, those who help finance them will” (p. 2).

The depth of states’ interest in saving taxpayers money by making transfer easier
and community colleges more attractive was highlighted in a 1997 article in The Chronicle of Higher Education (Schmidt, 1997). According to Schmidt, more than a dozen states nationwide have recently passed measures mandating acceptance of credits earned within the states’ public systems of higher education. According to the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB), “two-thirds of the SREB states [since 1994] have taken substantive actions to insure that students who earn college-level credits in one public institution will be able to transfer those credits to others” (Creech, 1995a, p. 2). Kintzer (1996) also noted that state legislators are increasing their involvement by mandating, or at least encouraging, policies and procedures for transfer and articulation, creating formulas for reporting transfer rates, and establishing performance indicators for assessing transfer student success.

For now, the lawmakers and higher education officials behind the new policies in the various states are simply trying to help students who otherwise might lose credits or have to repeat classes when they transfer from one college to another. But in the long term...they hope to unleash a quiet revolution in their higher education systems, with two-year colleges assuming an expanded role in providing remediation and general education credits to residents who plan to continue their education elsewhere (Schmidt, 1997, p. 2).

In his discussion of the state’s increasing role in higher education, McGuinness (1994) also identified the lack of coordination of two-year programs and frustrations with barriers to transfer and articulation as perennial issues in growing legislative pressures to restructure higher education and reduce costs. Driven primarily by financial, rather than academic interests, states are facing increased public demands to hold colleges

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accountable for productivity and efficiency of operations (Berdahl & McConnell, 1994). Taxpayers have recognized that without effective transfer and articulation policies, the public potentially pays twice for the same education (Bender, 1990; Chenoweth, 1998).

Although practitioners in the field typically do not think of higher education in political terms, public higher education operates in a political environment. Campus faculty and staff see transfer and articulation primarily as educational processes for assisting students in their progress toward a baccalaureate degree, but policy makers are also interested in protecting the public's interests. Whether transfer and articulation are viewed simply as issues in states' overall efforts to restructure higher education, or as catalysts for "unleash[ing] a quiet revolution" in higher education systems (Schmidt, 1997, p. 2), colleges and universities can expect increasing attempts by legislators to regulate transfer and articulation through public policies—not necessarily to advance or improve education per se, but to hold institutions accountable, to accomplish other social goals, and to use education as a means to problem-solving and satisfying constituents (Leslie & Routh, 1991; Mercer, 1994; Sabloff, 1997).

Economic pressures and quality issues have contributed to an increased interest in strengthening cooperation between the various segments of education, and equity and access to educational opportunities continue to rank high as social goals of statewide transfer policy (Mercer, 1992; Bender, 1990; Knoell, 1990; Watkins, 1990). Minorities and non-traditional students are disproportionately enrolled in community colleges, and legislators see the two-year college as a critical tool for increasing enrollments and graduation rates of these underrepresented groups in baccalaureate degree programs (Bender, 1990; Watkins, 1990). In addition, growing enrollments in secondary Tech Prep
programs, and increasing demands for baccalaureate degree options for graduates of
applied associate degree programs, have contributed to increased attention to transfer and
articulation issues (Bender, 1990).

According to Watkins (1990), “the sheer number of students [5.3 million] who
begin their undergraduate education in two-year colleges makes transferring a critical
issue.” The full extent of transfer activity from community colleges is unknown because
one of the difficulties in collecting data on transfer students is that transfer is defined in a
number of ways (Bender, 1990; Cohen, 1987; Knoell, 1990). Community college
students who matriculate at four-year institutions may do so after one or two courses or
after earning an associate degree. Others enroll concurrently at two- and four-year
institutions or transfer to private or out-of-state colleges (Cohen, 1987).

Cohen (1987) pointed out that not only are transfer data difficult to collect, but
they have been unimportant to community college staff since college funding is usually
based on the number of students enrolled in particular classes—not in particular
programs. Four-year institutions likewise have paid little attention to where their
upperclassmen were enrolled as freshmen (Cohen, 1987). In recent years, however, two
state-level actions have contributed to a growing interest in transfer students. First, state
policy makers are paying more attention to the quality of teacher-preparation programs
and the decline in the minority teacher population (Selingo & Basinger, 1999; Anglin, et
al, 1991). Community colleges contribute significantly to student transfers into teacher
education programs (Anglin, et al, 1991). Second, the move by several states toward
performance-based funding for higher education relies heavily on monitoring transfer
rates to provide financial incentives to community colleges (Carnevale, et al, 1998).
While state-level data on the number of students at four-year institutions who first enrolled in a community college are difficult to compile, some authors point to evidence that suggests that the number of transfer students is increasing as a result of, or in response to, state-mandated transfer and articulation policies (Watkins, 1990; Chenoweth, 1998). According to Chenoweth, few policy makers and practitioners can document the phenomenon, but “to say that half of four-year students received community college credits is becoming almost universal” (Parilla, cited in Chenoweth, p. 4). Zusman (1994) concurred in noting that community colleges enroll nearly 45% of all undergraduate students and are under increasing pressure to absorb students into their transfer programs—primarily because of rising tuition and admission standards at four-year institutions. And as affirmative action policies and practices come under attack, the role of community colleges as a tool for providing access to higher education will no doubt become even more important (Gallego, 1998).

State Approaches to Transfer Policies

States have developed a number of ways to address transfer and articulation issues depending on state structures for governance and coordination of higher education and the place of community colleges in that structure. Keith (1996) examined historical documents and the legislative initiatives that established states’ systems of community colleges and concluded that the age of a state’s system of community colleges influences differences in the way the two-year colleges are incorporated into the state’s system of higher education. He found that transfer opportunities (i.e., articulation agreements) are defined by the organization, governance, and coordination of the system (Keith, 1996). For example, if community colleges are viewed as extensions of high school, they come
under local education authority; but if they are viewed as part of the higher education system, authority is passed to the state, and transfer and articulation can be centralized at the state level (Keith, 1996).

The political reasons Keith (1996) identified for the development of community college systems seem to parallel reasons given for the development of articulation policies: (a) to protect the integrity of universities against lower standards (presumably brought on by rising college enrollments); and (b) to reduce program and course duplication by clearly defining the relationship between various segments of education (secondary and post-secondary). Although Keith's analysis contributes to an understanding of the political forces behind the development of transfer and articulation policies, Keith did not offer any evidence of how well the legislatively mandated approach works in assuring transfer opportunities for community college students. Keith (1996) argued that even though governance and policy-making related to transfer may be centralized, course content and instructional methods are decentralized to the individual institutions, and few states can guarantee uniformity of the general education core.

Through a reading of state policies, Bender (1990) identified four major types of state-level policies for transfer and articulation that are also reflective of the state's structure for the governance and coordination of higher education. The first type of articulation agreement recognizes the university-parallel associate degree as meeting lower division general education requirements for the baccalaureate degree, or requires acceptance of two-year college credits by the public four-year institutions. In highly centralized state systems, these agreements often are accompanied by common course numbering systems, development of course equivalency guides, or computer-based
transfer assistance programs that match courses and requirements at various institutions. Bender’s second type of articulation agreement relies on a statewide representative body, with or without legislative authority (i.e., coordinating boards), to monitor and assess transfer and articulation policies that are not legislatively mandated. The third type of state-level articulation depends only on a variety of student services and recruitment and retention programs at colleges and universities that support strong transfer relationships between institutions. A fourth type of transfer and articulation policy depends on a central database and information system that provides a mechanism for tracking compliance with state-level policies and assessing student performance (Bender, 1990).

Based on these four types of state-level policies for transfer and articulation, Bender (1990) contrasted the student-interest focus reflected in legislative actions regarding transfer and articulation and the institution-interest focus of state-level governing and coordinating groups. According to Bender, legislatures and inter-segmental governing bodies are more concerned with protecting student interests than are coordinating groups whose membership may be more interested in protecting the institutional autonomy of four-year colleges and universities. A 1999 survey of issue priorities conducted by SHEEO documented that the importance placed on transfer and articulation by governing boards was slightly higher than the ranking that coordinating boards gave to transfer and articulation issues (SHEEO, 1999).

In addition to reflecting organization and governance structures, views about transfer may also reflect perceptions of arrogance on the part of four-year institutions, and defensiveness on the part of two-year colleges (Cohen & Brawer, 1987; Dziech & Vilter, 1992; Watkins, 1990). “Universities also often deny credit to community college
courses that do closely parallel university courses simply because the universities consider such courses inappropriate for community colleges to teach” (Dougherty, 1994, p. 100). Quality and academic standards are major concerns of most four-year colleges and universities; and with their broad missions, open enrollment policies, and emphasis on workforce development, community colleges are often characterized as having less qualified faculty and weaker students who are inadequately prepared for upper-division studies (Dougherty, 1994; Dziech & Vilter, 1992; Jacobson, 1992; Vaughan, 1992; Watkins, 1990). Two-year colleges, on the other hand, defend their faculty’s teaching skills (Mellander & Robertson, 1992). They are concerned that their students are treated fairly and that policies apply equally to both transfer and native students (those who began their studies at the four-year institution) (Barry & Barry, 1992; Bender, 1990; Knoell, 1990).

Bender’s research, though descriptive of the problems inherent in developing transfer and articulation policies, did not address the issue of how state-level policies are implemented and what the effects are at the institutional level. Dougherty noted that “even when state law requires universities to accept community college general education courses or to give junior status to community college transfers with associate degrees of arts or of science, universities find many ways of avoiding this” (Dougherty, 1994, p. 261).

Policy-oriented Research on Transfer and Articulation

Policy-making is one course of action taken by institutions and states to deal with issues of concern. Fincher (1987) noted that although policy is a unifying concept central to the concerns of higher education, analyses of policy issues in higher education are
"promising but not highly sophisticated" (p. 285). Clarification of policy issues, argued Fincher, is "essential to the continued development and advancement of institutions of higher education" (p. 288).

Governing boards are not merely policy-making bodies that leave the implementation of policy to dedicated administrators. Both governing boards and institutional leaders are actively involved in policy development, and members of both groups can benefit from the clarification of policy, its formation, and its implementation in institutional settings (Fincher, 1987, p. 282).

Effective policy-making requires good information, but although states are becoming more active in academic issues, "unfortunately, the systematic collection, storage, retrieval, and analysis, and dissemination of information has not been a high priority of legislative budgets... Although many states have recognized this problem, few have taken positive steps to solve it" (Bender, 1990, p.23). Even where states have access to student data and can monitor enrollments, transfers, and academic achievement, policy-makers have little or no knowledge of what works effectively from a state policy perspective (Prager, 1994; Bender, 1990).

A 1990 report published by the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges (AACJC) (Bender, 1990) called on state legislators to require reports on transfer and articulation to: (a) ensure that the intent of statewide policy is achieved, (b) provide incentives for collaborative efforts between institutions to increase transfer rates of underrepresented groups, (c) create comprehensive student information systems to support data exchanges and monitor student performance, and (d) examine financial aid programs for transfer students to determine whether or not corrective action is needed.
Although numbers of transfers are useful as one measure of the effects of state transfer policies, Guba (1984), Lincoln (1990), and Keller (1998) argued that traditional quantitative approaches to policy analysis, evaluation and research are too limiting. Further, they argued that they examine only those things that can be measured, focusing more on the methods than on issues. To be effective, policy research must examine the value choices underlying policy definitions and seek to understand, as well as to build knowledge about, policy issues (Guba, 1984; Keller, 1998; Lincoln, 1990).

Another problem in conducting an analysis of state transfer policy is that researchers have not reached consensus on basic definitions of policy or on appropriate methodology for policy analysis in higher education (Dye, 1987; Guba, 1984; Keller, 1998; Terrenzini, 1996). Although policy decisions often are viewed in a political context, and as being mandated from the top down and implemented from the bottom up, Greer (1986) argued the importance of seeing policy formation and implementation as an iterative, interactive, and negotiating process of defining goals and resolving conflicts between the state legislature, the coordinating or governing board, and institutions over their perceptions of the problems that policy should be designed to address (Greer, 1986; McLaughlin, 1991).

Quantitative approaches to policy analysis and evaluation focus on the what and how much aspects of policy formation and compliance, without addressing what happens in the real world of policy implementation (McLaughlin, 1991; Trow, 1997). According to Yanow (1996), the important question is whether or not the policy has been implemented rather than whether or not it has been effective. If policy is not implemented, its effects cannot be assessed.
One of the problems for policy implementation in states with coordinating, rather than governing, boards is that differing perspectives are held on the authority of state level coordinating boards to effect change in transfer practices, when by definition coordinating boards cannot mandate change at the institutional level (Fisher, 1995; Greer, 1986; Knoell, 1990). In the politics of education policy, the coordinating board operates both as a state regulatory agency and as an advocate for higher education institutions (Greer, 1986).

Setting policy and carrying it out necessarily involve bargaining, negotiation, and adjustment. Implementation of policy goals where the authority to mandate a given outcome is absent requires coordination, cooperation, and conflict resolution. However, coordination also requires some initial agreement on goal definition; accordingly, strategies designed to achieve a certain goal (implementation) cannot be separated entirely from the definition of that goal (policy formulation) (Greer, 1986, pp. 29-30).

Rather than focus on goal definition, Guba (1984) argued convincingly in an article on the outcomes of policy analysis that “varying interpretations of the word policy greatly affect how and where particular policies are created and implemented, and ultimately, whether their results are as intended” (p. 63). In other words, in examining the components and effects of a given policy, Guba suggested that applying different definitions to the word policy itself would produce different questions, methods of analysis, and different policy outcomes.

Finally, Greer (1986) identified four “resource variables” that facilitate or impede policy implementation: (a) time—perceptions of the importance of the issue that
determine the amount of time devoted to it, (b) information—expertise and ability to collect, analyze, and disseminate information to support the policy, (c) constituency support—where the support for the policy comes from and how it is communicated, and (d) authority—ability to control resources that provide incentives to comply with policy.

Thus, policy implementation ultimately depends on congruence of the goals among the stakeholders, the definitions applied to the word policy, and the resources available to support the policy. Different combinations of these factors will produce different policy outcomes and determine the likelihood that the policy will be implemented (Greer, 1986; McLaughlin, 1991; Odden, 1991).

Statement of the Problem

Studies of states’ efforts to address transfer issues through public policy have contributed little to an understanding of how state mandates work at the institutional level to ensure transfer opportunities for community college students (Bender, 1990; Knoell, 1990). How are the policies understood and implemented at the institutional level?

To examine the effect of state transfer and articulation policies on colleges and universities, this study used an interpretive approach to “implementation analysis” (Sabatier, 1986) to focus on the way particular Virginia institutions—community colleges and four-year colleges and universities, have implemented the State Policy on Transfer adopted in 1991. Using a case study methodology, this descriptive study compared how Virginia’s state policy on transfer and articulation has been interpreted and implemented at specific community colleges and four-year institutions to which community college students transfer. Rather than taking a top-down approach to
determine how well the institutions have complied with specific requirements of the policy, a bottom-up approach was used to examine the effects of local contexts and policy adaptations on policy outcomes and the multiple meanings that policies can support (Greer, 1986; Guba, 1984; McLaughlin, 1991; Odden, 1991; Yanow, 1996).

The study addressed the following questions:

• What are faculty and staff understandings of the meaning of the State Policy on Transfer?

• How do their understandings of the state policy fit with the practices of their institutions? How important is the transfer function to the mission of the college?

• How is the state policy implemented at the campus level? Is it adapted to meet the institution’s needs, or is the policy largely ignored? How are the policy meanings communicated?

• How do faculty and staff understandings of the policy contribute to variations in transfer outcomes, practices, and perceptions of policy effectiveness?

• Does the ambiguity of the policy allow colleges to define the policy through the process of implementation?

A Case Study in Policy Implementation

Virginia’s State Policy on Transfer provides an interesting issue for studying public policy implementation because of the high degree of autonomy of the state’s institutions and the limited authority of its central coordinating board—the Council of Higher Education for Virginia. Virginia’s public system of higher education is composed of fifteen four-year colleges and universities with their own governing boards, and a
system of twenty-three community colleges governed by a single state board—the State Board for Community Colleges. The board of a four-year institution governs one public two-year college, which although not a part of the state's system of community colleges, is covered by the State Policy on Transfer. By definition, the state council cannot mandate policy at the institutional level, but rather uses its authority for institution and program approvals and closures and budget recommendations to influence and direct institutional actions toward meeting public policy goals (Fisher, 1995; Greer, 1986; Mills, 1998).

In 1991, the state council and the community college board adopted a statewide policy to provide guidelines for transfer and articulation between Virginia's two-year colleges and four-year colleges and universities (Appendix A). The process of policy development included stakeholders from all segments of higher education as well as members of the council's and the community college board's staffs. The range of institutional missions, values and cultures represented in the policy formation process required of policy-makers a high level of skill in negotiation and persuasion. The policy developed was comprehensive and included elements of all four of Bender's four types of state-level transfer and articulation policies. The policy has been in effect long enough to examine trends in the numbers of transfers over five years of policy implementation—from 1993 to 1998.

Limitations and Delimitations

A useful study of state transfer policies must do more than describe policy. It must also interpret policy in context—how it is developed and implemented, the availability and constraints of resources and knowledge, the consequences of not
choosing other policy alternatives, and the intended and unintended outcomes (Bardach, 1996; Dye, 1987; Fincher, 1987; Leslie & Brown, 1999;). This study was designed to focus on policy implementation and its impact on institutions.

Berdahl (1987) characterized research in policy-making for higher education as “a variety of case studies, wisdom pieces, and commission reports” (p. 47), which Fincher (1987) characterized as long on recommendations but short on analysis. Nevertheless, Berdahl argued that case studies have contributed important insights to research on state policy-making and its impact on institutions.

“Insights” is an important word here, for in this field it will be necessary to rely heavily for the foreseeable future on insights, also known as “wisdom” or verstehen. Guba and Lincoln (1981) have recently given methodological legitimacy to verstehen in the form of “naturalistic inquiry,” and while good, tough empirical studies using statistical data will always be needed in this area, so too will qualitative approaches that recognize the indeterminate nature and variability of most state policy processes (Berdahl, 1987, p. 48).

This case study examined how Virginia’s transfer policy is interpreted and implemented at the institution level. This study looked at policy communication, compliance or avoidance, and policy outcomes in the context of Guba’s (1984) policy definitions. As illustrated in the model shown in Figure 2, the policy rationale—its meaning or definition was examined as the tie between policy-making and policy implementation (Guba, 1984; Yanow, 1996).

Transfer and articulation are complex issues in higher education policy. The
number of individuals involved in the transfer process, the diversity of goals, purposes and missions of two- and four-year institutions, and the degree to which the institutions reflect the values of their local communities or peer institutions contribute to the complexity of the issue (Bender, 1990; Coombs, n.d.; Knoell, 1990). Successful transfer depends on the relationships institutions have with one another in the broader context of higher education (Keith, 1996), as well as students’ social, psychological, and economic reasons for transferring (Cohen, 1995; Lee & Frank, 1990; Velez & Javali, 1987).

Transfer and articulation policies also reflect core values in American higher education and beliefs about who should have access to higher education opportunities and at what cost to the taxpayer (Barry & Barry, 1992). Furthermore, state policy mandates may be perceived as challenging traditional faculty prerogatives with the potential of creating tension over control of the curriculum—what, when, and by whom the general education core should be taught (Bender, 1990; Cohen, 1994).

Coombs (n.d.) suggested a number of theoretical frameworks for looking at the way values are allocated in policy-making, but these approaches were limited to an examination of the policy-making process or of the policy itself. This study did not address the policy-making process or the substance of transfer policy, but rather the perceptions of policy definitions that influence policy implementation. Policy effectiveness was considered to the extent that policy definitions affect institutional perceptions of effectiveness, or that institutional strategies for implementing the policy seem to impede or facilitate transfer.

No attempt was made to establish a causal relationship between policy implementation and transfer activity or transfer rates; nevertheless, quantitative data on
transfer activity from community colleges to public four-year institutions in the state was
used to select institutions for the case studies. Trend data on numbers of transfer
students from 1993-1998 served to indicate the possible effect or lack of effect of transfer
policy implementation and to identify outliers and typical levels of transfer activity in the
state. If the policy has been effective, a rise in the numbers of transfers could be
expected.

The purpose of the case study was not to find solutions for closing the gap
between policy intent and outcomes. Neither was the purpose to influence, directly or
indirectly, changes to the existing policy. The purpose of this study was to contribute to
an understanding of how state transfer policy is interpreted, communicated, and
implemented at the campus level in the context of Guba’s (1984) theory of the effect of
policy definitions on the outcomes of public policy. The expectation was that policy
implementation actually shapes policy based on varying definitions and that there is not
one transfer policy, but many policies in Virginia.

Results of this case study hopefully will contribute to an understanding, not
necessarily of the policy effects statewide, but of policy effects at the institutional level.
The study has limited generalizability because it was conducted within the context of
existing policy and practice in only five of Virginia’s twenty-three community colleges
and the particular four-year institutions to which their students transfer. The study does,
however, compare the way policy meanings are interpreted and communicated on
campuses with varying levels of transfer activity. Consideration was given to perceptions
of the state council’s role in policy implementation, but the policy’s meaning to
legislators, students, or the general public were outside the scope of this study.
The literature suggests that policy makers in higher education have little knowledge of what works effectively from a state policy perspective, yet legislatures appear to be increasing their efforts to address transfer policy issues (Bender, 1990; Kintzer, 1996). Policy analysis—primarily focused on policy-making processes and outcomes, may not be as fruitful an area of study for understanding higher education policy as the area of policy implementation (Leslie & Routh, 1991). An “inquiry” approach based on questions, rather than an “evaluative” approach designed to provide answers (Yanow, 1996) was used in this study to examine and understand the impact a transfer policy has in a state where colleges have had a high degree of autonomy, and the coordinating board has limited authority to enforce mandates aimed at serving the public’s interests. Hopefully, the study results will contribute to discussions of transfer and articulation as important public policy issues, and lead to better policy-making for higher education.

Definitions of Terms

Articulation —systematic efforts, processes, or services intended to ensure educational continuity and to facilitate orderly, unobstructed progress between two- and four-year colleges and universities on a statewide, regional, or institution-to-institution basis (Bender, 1990, p. viii)

Associate degree —an academic program representing a level of academic development and performance reflected in student learning outcomes sufficient to move on to upper division collegiate work or to enter directly into specific occupations in the workplace (AACC Policy Statement, 1998)
**Associate in Applied Science degree** — an associate degree program designed to lead directly to employment in a specific career but may be recognized by some baccalaureate degree granting institutions for transfer credits (AACC Policy Statement, 1998)

**Associate in Arts degree** — a transfer degree that emphasizes the arts, humanities, or social sciences (AACC Policy Statement, 1998)

**Associate in Science degree** — a transfer degree that emphasizes agriculture, engineering and technology, mathematics, or the natural sciences (AACC Policy Statement, 1998)

**Block transfer** — a group of courses, such as a general education core, that is designed to transfer as a whole rather than on a course-by-course basis (Tennessee Board of Regents, 1999) (See definition of transfer module)

**Case study** — a specific, complex, bounded, integrated system selected for study on the basis of what can be learned or understood about a particular case or issue (Stake, 1995)

**Collective case study** — coordination between individual case studies for the purpose of maximizing what can be learned or understood about a particular issue (Stake, 1995)

**Comprehensive community college** — an institution of higher education offering programs of instruction generally extending not more than two years beyond the high school level, which shall include, but not be limited to, courses in occupational/technical fields, the
liberal arts and sciences, general education, continuing adult education, pre-college and
pre-technical preparatory programs, special training programs to meet the economic
needs of the region in which the college is located, and other services to meet the cultural
and educational needs of the region (VCCS Policy Manual, 2A-1, 1991)

Course equivalency table/transfer guide—a list of courses that will transfer between
respective institutions and will be identified as either equivalent to a particular course
content at the receiving institution or as elective credit (Tennessee Board of Regents,
1999)

General education core—the core curriculum in the liberal arts, humanities, natural or
physical sciences, social sciences that all undergraduates of an institution of higher
education are required to complete before receiving a degree (Texas higher Education
Coordinating Board, 2000)

Limited access or over-enrolled program—academic programs for which the number of
qualified applicants exceeds the number that can be enrolled because of limited resources
(Knoell, 1990, p. 19)

Mandate—statutes, resolutions, and budget language adopted by state legislatures that
may be laws governing specific transfer practices or directives to others to establish
transfer policies or practices (Knoell, 1990, p. 12)
Native student – a degree-seeking student who enters a college or university as a first-time freshman subsequent to the summer following high school graduation (Illinois Faculty, Advisor, and Counselor Transfer Information, 2000)

Occupational/technical program – a training program for the para-professional and technician that typically includes 75 or 80 percent of the work in the area of specialization and related coursework, and typically requires less rigor and academic background than transfer programs (Bender, 1990, p. 14)

Policy – a purposive course of action followed by an actor or set of actors in dealing with a problem or matter of concern (Foundation of Public Policy and Higher Education, p. 173)

State – legislatures, agencies for statewide planning and coordination, and governing boards for multi-institutional systems of colleges and universities (Knoell, 1990, p. 11)

Transfer – mechanisms used by institutions to facilitate admission, credit recognition, and related services for transfer students (Bender, 1990, p. viii)

Transfer or university parallel degree – an associate in arts or associate in science degree program designed to prepare a student to transfer as a junior to an upper division baccalaureate degree program (AACC Policy Statement, 1999)
Transfer module – a coherent set of courses (35 credits distributed among core areas) that forms the foundation of a solid liberal education for college students (Virginia’s State Policy on Transfer, 1991) (See block transfer)

Transfer rate – all students entering the community college in a given year who have no prior college experience and who complete at least twelve college units divided into the number of that group who take one or more classes at an in-state public university within four years (Cohen, 1995, p. 28)

Transfer student – a student who seeks to move from one institution to another expecting credit recognition for course work successfully completed and expecting to be treated equitably with all other students (Bender, 1990, p. viii)

Two-plus-two agreement – a formal agreement between higher education institutions designed to articulate a structured two-year curriculum at the community college and the last two years of a curriculum at the baccalaureate degree granting institution (Bender, 1990)
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The Transfer Function

Influenced by both the child development focus of high schools and the universities' focus on scholarship, the contradictory mission of the public two-year college can be traced to conflicting perspectives on the history of comprehensive community colleges (Callan, 1997; Dougherty, 1994; Wagoner, 1985). Central to the mission debate are arguments over their legitimacy as transfer institutions (Callan, 1997; Wagoner, 1985). Perhaps no other function has been more dominant, more controversial, or more criticized within the community college as the transfer function (Bender, 1990; Cohen and Brawer, 1987; Dougherty, 1994). Dougherty (1994) noted that while some writers have argued the case for strengthening the occupational-technical mission of the community college and minimizing its role in transfer education, others believe that the future viability of the community college rests with a renewal of its commitment to transfer (Brint and Karabel, 1989; Cohen and Brawer, 1987; Eaton, 1994; Zwerling, 1976). Nevertheless, transfer remains a critical issue for community colleges.

"The difficulty that students continue to have in transferring credits between two-year and four-year colleges remains one of the truly intractable problems of American higher education" (Cicarelli, 1993, p. 1). Joseph Creech of the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) has argued that transfer is a "front burner" issue in the SREB states (SHEEO, 1997), and Cicarelli (1993) noted in an article on the problems...
of transfer students that public institutions must understand these problems may eventually be resolved with or without their help. A few states already have begun taking the initiative” (Cicarelli, 1993, p. 1).

Transfer rates have become popular benchmarks for legislators developing accountability systems for higher education (Mingle, 1997). Legislators believe that the solution to the transfer problem is ensuring that community college credits transfer to any public institution in the state, and with the increased focus of states on workforce preparation and economic development, the pressure is growing to ensure also the transferability of applied occupational-technical degrees (Mingle, 1997).

States have taken various approaches to making the transfer process more effective and efficient, but an examination of policies in the sixteen member states of the Southern Regional Education Board showed that most have involved mandating the development of course equivalencies, if not guaranteed admissions, for community college students transferring to four-year colleges and universities. But what does the literature suggest about what works from a public policy perspective?

A Taxonomy for Guiding the Literature Review

Based on J. T. Dillon’s (1984) ordered sequence of research questions, Leslie and Brown’s (1999) taxonomy of policy-oriented research strategies was applied as a guide to a review of the literature on the origins and implementation strategies of state transfer and articulation policies to answer the following questions:

Policy antecedents. What are the historical foundations and the social, political, and economic contexts for transfer and articulation policies? Why are community colleges important to public policy for higher education?
Policy studies. Are there case studies that illustrate the complexity of issues and the many factors that impact the development of state transfer policies? What are the public policy issues in transfer education?

Policy monitoring. How have states responded to the perceived need for public policy, and how have transfer practices changed over time?

Policy evaluation. What have been the reported effects of transfer policies on transfer behavior and the achievement of policy goals? Have the policies been effective?

Policy analysis. What assumptions are inherent in transfer policies? What are the factors that appear to be correlated with results? What are the policy alternatives?

Policy research. What theoretical or conceptual frameworks have been applied to state transfer policies? Are they useful for examining transfer behavior and achievement of public policy goals? Why or why not?

Historical Foundations for Transfer Policy

The American community college has evolved from the junior college of the early 1900s, with a primary focus on transfer, to the technical college of the 1940s and 1950s and its “terminal” programs for work force preparation, to become by the 1970s a comprehensive community college that attempts to balance program offerings for transfer, work force preparation, and adult continuing education. But since the late 1980s, transfer has emerged again as a focus of state-level discussions of public policy and higher education (Mingle, 1997; Eaton, 1994). The impetus for this resurgence of interest in transfer cannot be attributed to a single cause and effect, but rather to the complex relationships between social, economic, and political factors in the broader context for higher education. Eaton (1994) argued that “as states seek to gain tighter
control over standards for K-12 and post-secondary education, community colleges will find that transfer must once again be the dominant function of the community college” if they are to remain a viable part of the higher education community (p. 38).

William Rainey Harper is generally recognized as the founder of the two-year junior college (Callan, 1997; Dougherty, 1994; Wagoner, 1985). Wagoner (1985) noted that interest in “creating true universities, dedicated to the highest levels of scholarship” prompted higher education leaders in the late 1800s to separate the first two years from the upper levels of baccalaureate study (p. 5). As early as 1892, Harper modeled the University of Chicago after the German educational system and divided it into the lower division academic college for general education and the upper division university college (Dougherty, 1994; Eaton, 1994; Levine, 1986). Using the terms “junior” and “senior” to distinguish between the two divisions of undergraduate study, his intent was to “purify” the university and gain status equal to the German institutions, and to divert less qualified students away from the university (Brint & Karabel, 1989). Yet, the two-year college was originally created as a separate organization within the university and not as a separate institution (Brint & Karabel, 1989).

In 1900, Harper instituted the associate degree as an award for completion of the junior college curriculum. The associate degree was intended to be a terminal degree for students who, though not well suited for more specialized university work, desired collegiate course work. Structure, order, and efficiency became the benchmarks of this educational reform, and the proper diagnosis and placement of students was also a top priority (Wagoner, 1985).

David Stark Jordan at Stanford shared Harper’s vision that “all should have a fair
chance to be educated to the limits of their abilities” while preserving the elite universities for the “fittest” students (Wagoner, 1985, p. 7). But Lange at the University of California at Berkeley envisioned the junior college as an institution with its own distinct mission as a “capstone of secondary education,” or as an extension of high school for students more interested in vocational than professional careers—an institution that would be an integral part of the community rather than an “ivory tower” separate from it (Wagoner, 1985, p. 8).

Thus, the public junior colleges were from the outset a stepping-stone for students who were financially unable or academically unprepared to attend a four-year college after graduation from high school, but these multipurpose institutions stressed education for employment as well (Eaton, 1994). By the end of World War I, the idea of the junior college had spread nationally, but confusion over its purpose was evident. Wagoner (1985) cited a 1919 report that noted “we do not know what it should be, because we do not know what it is. Before we can see clearly what it is, we must know why it is” (p. 9). Leaders of 175 junior colleges met in 1920 to create the American Association of Junior Colleges (AAJC) as a forum for discussion of mutual problems, but debates over the role of the junior college in higher education led to the adoption in 1921 of its definition as “an institution offering two years of instruction of strictly collegiate grade” (Brick, 1964, pp. 33-34, cited in Wagoner, 1985). The majority of two-year institutions was private, and although highly diverse, focused on the liberal arts and transfer education (Callan, 1997; Brint & Karabel, 1989).

The modern public junior college developed after World War I, when it ceased to function solely as a preparatory institution and became a “terminal” institution to prepare
students for pre-professional and technical careers. Levine (1986) pointed out that in the 1920s, the curriculum of the junior college shifted from transfer to technical training in areas that did not require a four-year degree. Discussions about junior colleges shifted to the need for terminal programs for students not intending to go on to the universities (Wagoner, 1985). These terminal programs included vocational and general education, and began the transformation of the junior college from an institution primarily concerned with transfer to one also concerned with guiding and preparing students as semi-professionals (Brint & Karabel, 1989; Wagoner, 1985). According to Levine, these "people's colleges" were "designed to meet society's perceived needs, not students' expectations," yet they came to be viewed as symbols of democracy and equality of opportunity and economic growth and progress. These institutions symbolized the belief "that the state owes everyone an education—or, at least a degree" (Levine, 1986, p. 164).

During the depression years from 1932 until 1939, junior colleges offered an alternative to being unemployed and an economical way to get a college education (Callan, 1997). Public support of the junior colleges filled the needs of students too poor to travel out of their local communities for an education. Although junior colleges attempted to serve both the transfer and the terminal functions, the social and economic efficiency of distinctive missions prompted the emergence of the vocational junior college during the depression. By extending secondary education, students were also kept out of the labor market during their training (Callan, 1997).

But again, the purpose of public support was efficiency—avoidance of duplication of institutional missions. Land-grant institutions and teacher's colleges were restricted in the liberal arts that could be offered (Levine, 1986). Legislators in California...
called for statewide coordination of public institutions to avoid duplication and competition between the various sectors and protect the curriculum of the elite institutions. California implemented a system of matching students to institutions based on their ability and interests, and set appropriate enrollment levels for various fields of study, thus creating obstacles to student movement from one segment to another (Levine, 1986).

One result of this differentiation was that public junior colleges continued to be viewed as extensions of high schools. The public junior college experienced rapid growth, but as late as the 1930s, 75% of these colleges were still located within the high schools (Levine, 1986). Surveys after World War I showed, however, that these institutions were most successful when they were located in isolated regions and served the higher education needs of a rural population that saw the college as a comprehensive, rather than as a narrowly defined or terminal institution (Levine, 1986).

By the 1940s, the terminal function of junior colleges was seen as the most dominant function by professional educators, although the public still viewed junior colleges as facilitating access to four-year institutions (Levine, 1986). But the public junior college emerged as a predominantly vocational institution between the world wars.

Veterans supported by the G. I. Bill enrolled heavily in the junior colleges following World War II (Wagoner, 1985). Truman’s 1947 report of the Commission on Higher Education contributed to the junior college’s growing popularity by recommending statewide networks of local colleges to put higher education within commuting distance for most Americans (Wagoner, 1985). Although students still preferred the pre-college to the vocational track, these “community colleges” drew...
attention to the high number of junior college transfer students who never transferred by adding yet another function to the two-year college mission—remedial education (Brint & Karabel, 1989; Wagoner, 1985). This new community college became a second chance institution for those who were unprepared for university study (Bring & Karabel, 1989).

Universal schooling and equality of opportunity emerged as key components of America's postwar “meritocracy” (Brint & Karabel, 1989). The 1960s were referred to as the golden era of expansion for the new community colleges—instututions that were more comprehensive than technical schools or junior colleges (Wagoner, 1985). Although early junior colleges had been primarily private institutions, the community college growth was in the public sector. State legislatures built community college systems across the nation to meet increased demand, and the model for state systems became California's Master Plan for Higher Education (Brint & Karabel, 1989).

California's plan created a hierarchical, segmented system that allocated students to three tiers based on high school academic records (Brint & Karabel, 1989). The purpose of the plan, according to Brint and Karabel (1989), was to divert students away from the universities and state college system to the junior colleges. The net effect was to protect the upper tiers from a large influx of students into a protected and elite system. The California Master Plan had an effect nationwide on admissions policies at state institutions (Brint & Karabel, 1989). Community colleges “[made] it possible for the public four-year institutions to reject a student without denying him an opportunity for higher education” (McConnell, 1962, cited in Brint and Karabel, 1989, p. 11), allowing four-year colleges to become more selective.
Foundations responded to the growing prominence of community colleges by providing funds to the national association (AAJC) for research, and by the end of the 1960s, two-year colleges enjoyed considerable support (Brint & Karabel, 1989; Wagoner, 1985). Although the growth of community college systems was rapid, Dougherty (1994) noted that it was uneven with variations in the rate of growth across the states. He attributed those variations to the social, economic and political environments in each of the states and to the fact that community colleges developed as products of policy—national, state, and local.

Limiting his analysis to post-1960, Dougherty (1994) tried to explain not only why community colleges developed, but also why they did not develop, in certain states. Acknowledging that student demand and demand from business and industry contributed to the rise and expansion of the community college, Dougherty argued that government officials played the key role, and that “state relative autonomy theory” explains its uneven growth (Dougherty, 1994, p. 9).

Dougherty (1994) argued that community colleges did not emerge as a direct response to business and industry or to student demand. State universities often supported community colleges to protect their own autonomy and selectivity in admissions, and school superintendents aligned themselves with two-year colleges to promote themselves as innovators in education by expanding educational opportunities. Legislators saw community colleges as a way to channel students into lower-cost institutions, thus lowering state budgets, creating good economic conditions, and increasing the likelihood of reelection (Dougherty, 1994). In other words, Dougherty’s study demonstrated how self interest drove government officials at all levels to support
the growth of community college systems, "conditioned by the structural and ideological power of business and, less so, students" (Dougherty, 1994, p. 12).

Dougherty (1994) saw government officials as responsible also for the shift from transfer to vocational education in the community college. By supporting employee training with public funds, officials benefited themselves as well as business and industry. The power of government officials to effect education policy-making is reflected in Dougherty's observation.

For local educators, the local community college was superior to a four-year college under state control because it better promised them access to college teaching and administrative jobs, and it was preferable to a vocational-technical school because it yielded greater prestige. State university officials, meanwhile, favored community college development over expanding their own institutions because it meant less crowding and better protection for selective university admissions. State governors and legislators, finally, preferred the community college to expanding the four-year colleges because it was cheaper for the state and would better yield vocational education graduates who could attract business investment (Dougherty, 1994, p. 184).

The effects of political self-interest were also apparent in the 1970s when the market for college graduates declined, and the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education echoed the California Plan by calling for increasing the proportion of students in two-year colleges while decreasing the number enrolled in transfer programs (Brint & Karabel, 1989). Changing market forces contributed to a renewed interest in the value of a two-year technical degree and an increase in the number of non-traditional students.
enrolling in community colleges (Brint & Karabel, 1989).

By the 1980s, community colleges had become predominantly vocational institutions, "yet the triumph of vocationalism, and the concomitant weakening of academic transfer programs, has brought in its wake a serious crisis of institutional legitimacy" (Bring & Karabel, 1989, p. 135). With the rise of public interest in accountability and academic standards for educational institutions, community college programs have come under closer scrutiny, with some legislators questioning the advisability of providing public support for institutions that do not contribute to higher transfer rates and numbers of graduates with baccalaureate degrees (Brint and Karabel, 1989).

In the 1990s, the transfer function of community colleges has once again become a target of public attention, primarily because of rising costs and issues of minority access to higher education (Cohen, 1996). According to Cohen (1996), reports of the decline of transfer education in community colleges have been exaggerated. Enrollments in liberal arts courses as a percentage of total credit enrollments were at 56% in 1991, but as Cohen pointed out, many of these courses also meet general education distribution requirements in the applied degrees (Cohen, 1996). Clearly, community colleges have become an integral part of the higher education landscape, but in its efforts to be all things to all people, the community college has contributed to a blurring of its educational mission (Callan, 1997).

Public Policy Issues in Transfer

Just as in the early days of the public junior colleges, concerns over enrollment growth, access, and efficiency in higher education are prompting state legislators to look
more closely at transfer as a means for addressing these issues (Creech, 1995b). States are projecting dramatic rises in the number of students enrolling in post-secondary institutions, and studies of college-bound students indicate that over 50% of those entering college for a baccalaureate degree matriculate at a community college (Bender, 1990; Creech, 1995). The percentage is even higher for those under represented and minority groups, and elimination of affirmative action policies in some states may drive less-prepared minority students back to two-year colleges that have open admissions policies and student support programs (Chenoweth, 1998; Cohen, 1995; Knoell, 1996).

Increased competitiveness in a complex, technologically advanced global economy has contributed to higher demand for post-secondary training and education, and the pool of potential transfer students from two-year colleges is becoming increasingly non-traditional: (a) displaced workers and the unemployed, (b) those needing to upgrade skills to maintain employment or advance, (c) women reentering the work force after child-rearing, (d) welfare recipients required to meet conditions of employment to continue their benefits, and (e) those needing to formally validate (with credentials) their prior learning and life experience to compete in the work force (Knoell, 1996). With increased federal emphasis on raising academic standards for secondary vocational education, School-to-Work and technical preparation programs (Tech Prep), community colleges play an important role in meeting the need for more advanced technologically skilled graduates. But Knoell (1996) argued that as long as the bachelor’s degree continues to be perceived as the primary mechanism for achieving economic success, transfer would continue to dominate the mission of community colleges.
For a number of reasons, college transfer policies and practices have become in the 1990s increasingly more important to states. In Alabama, transfer policies are directed at increasing flexibility across institutions and achieving a better balance between general education and major requirements to address the skills needed in a global, technological, and literate society (AGSC, 2000). Arkansas’ 1994 articulation agreement was aimed at increasing graduation rates and “foster[ing] greater collegiality in the intellectual marketplace of the state” (Articulation Agreement, 1994, p. 1). Delaware’s transfer policies promote “economies of effort and expenditure” by optimizing the use of resources, avoiding duplication of programs, and fostering “institutional integrity and cooperation” (Transfer policies, 2000, p. 1). Florida’s 1995 statutes ensure high quality, diversity, access, and “effective and efficient use of human and physical resources,” and that institutions “function cooperatively with other educational institutions and systems” (Statutes, 1995, p. 1).

Georgia’s interest in developing transfer policies was prompted by the need for a plan to accommodate growth and to encourage more students to start at a community college because of the greater capacity to absorb increased enrollments (Bowen, 1997). Maryland’s policy on articulation and transfer is focused on improving transfer among all institutions of higher education and is based on expectations of student mobility and the need to “remove barriers to a concept of a seamless educational experience” (Strategic Plan, 2000, p. 1). South Carolina’s intent was to “remove artificial barriers which are wasteful of time, taxpayers’ dollars, and students’ and families’ investment” (Consideration, 1996, p. 1). The discussion of transfer in Texas has focused on remediation and the need to bring students “up to speed” in the community college.
before enrolling in a four-year institution (Bowen, 1997), and Oklahoma was interested in simply making it easier to transfer when it developed its transfer policy (CEP, 1999).

States such as California, Florida, Texas, and Washington rely heavily on community colleges to provide both initial access to higher education and occupational-technical training (Callan, 1997). By effecting changes in the competition between public institutions for first-time enrolled students, those states have assisted institutions in distinguishing their missions and limiting the influence of the marketplace on enrollments, thereby containing costs and minimizing duplication of programs across the system (Callan, 1997; Robertson & Frier, 1996).

States appear to be moving toward greater diversity, less autonomy, and more coordination of public higher education, at least partly because of public demands for reform and improvement in the K-12 sector (Callan, 1997; Eaton, 1994). Ensuring quality also is behind the growth of such collaborative programs as Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, Dual Enrollment, and Tech Prep—programs that give secondary school students opportunities to complete college courses while still in high school. States have shifted from viewing education from the perspective of institution types or levels (K12, community colleges, four-year colleges and universities) to seeing it as a K-16 continuum (Lynch, 1994; Robertson & Frier, 1996).

Monitoring Transfer—How States Have Responded

Anecdotal stories of transfer students who lost credits have contributed to perceptions that two- and four-year colleges and universities fail to work cooperatively to facilitate transfer and articulation across this continuum, and many states have taken action to mandate policy and procedures or provide incentives for inter-institutional
cooperation (Kladko, 1999). In 1989 alone, thirteen states passed laws on articulation and transfer—evidence that obstacles to transfer were perceived as “abuses” of the taxpayer (Bender, 1990). All states now have some form of coordinating authority to promote collaboration between the various segments of education (Robertson & Frier, 1996). Kintzer (1982) described four patterns of state articulation and transfer policies: (a) formal and legally based guidelines and policies, (b) state system policies, (c) voluntary agreements among institutions, and (d) special agreements on vocational and technical credit transfer. Bender (1990) classified state-level articulation into four categories of activities: (a) statewide articulation agreements, (b) state-level articulation bodies, (c) transfer student services, and (d) performance indicator or feedback systems.

States have used a number of approaches to facilitate transfer, including the following.

1. Using student financial aid and budget allocations to encourage transfer;
2. Developing uniform course numbering systems or a common general education core to facilitate transfer;
3. Creating information technology networks to support transfer; and
4. Developing assessments (such as tests for rising sophomores) to distinguish between the various segments of education to ensure students are prepared to advance to the next level (Robertson and Frier, 1996).

Prager (1994) pointed out that few states have conducted follow-up studies to determine the effectiveness of state transfer policies in promoting transfer. A search of the ERIC database and SREB member states’ Web pages yielded no studies of state policy or evidence of policy analysis of transfer and articulation policies. Although
policy mandates may serve as a catalyst for change, “the underlying premise of transfer and articulation is that a uniform value can be assigned to a specific body of knowledge, wherever and however it is acquired” (Robertson & Frier, 1996, p. 23). Articulation policies are based on an assumption of student competencies, but operate on the basis of course equivalencies. Students can be denied earned credit if the content of the courses presented in transfer does not reflect comparable or equivalent course content at the four-year institution. Articulation is also based on an assumption of common criteria and standards of performance that define college-level work as a hierarchy of “upper” or “lower” division, or as “academic” or “vocational” courses. Few states, however, have the resources necessary to support statewide discussions between two- and four-year faculty for the purpose of reaching consensus on what students should know and be able to do (Prager, 1994).

To avoid issues related to competencies or the diversity of students, institutions, and courses, state policies often mandate acceptance of the associate in arts or sciences degrees towards fulfilling lower division requirements for the baccalaureate degree, or use a common exam to ensure readiness for upper division work. The intent of these policies then becomes uniformity and fair treatment of all transfer students by all public four-year institutions, but it avoids the issue of competitive admission to highly selective programs and penalizes students who are ready to transfer before completing the associate degree—by far the largest group of potential transfers (Prager, 1994).

One of the greatest obstacles to effective articulation policies is the lack of statewide data bases to monitor transfer student progress and assess the impact of state policy on transfer behaviors (Bender, 1990; Bracco, 1997). Policy makers are faced with
developing statewide policies and procedures without valid and reliable data to support the need for government intervention over voluntary collaboration (Leslie & Routh, 1991). Institutions argue that the diversity of students, programs, and courses make it increasingly difficult to articulate programs across public institutions, while legislators argue that state policies assure transfer opportunities and preparation for baccalaureate degree studies, ease of transfer, and higher rates of baccalaureate degree completion for all citizens who can benefit (Kintzer, 1982; Robertson & Frier, 1996).

To ensure the effectiveness of transfer policies, states are standardizing assessments, demanding formulas for reporting transfer rates, and establishing performance indicators of transfer student success (Kintzer, 1996; Eaton, 1994). Such prescriptive legislative mandates, although heavily debated, reflect public concern not only for the student as consumer, but also for the taxpayers’ return on investment in public higher education. The basic assumption of these accountability measures is that valid and reliable data are available for developing and evaluating policy. Bender (1990) pointed out, however, that few states maintain the kind of comprehensive student databases to monitor student flow and performance that would aid in improving transfer and articulation. Information on applications, transfer admission, credits recognized or rejected, or on transfer student performance, persistence and academic status are often unavailable and sometimes known but not shared (p. 12).

As Bender suggested, “this creates a serious dilemma—centralized decision-making without centralized information” (p. 23).

Member states of the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB), including
Virginia, have nevertheless worked to develop or to improve policies and procedures to facilitate transfer. "Since 1994, two-thirds of the SREB states have taken substantive actions to insure that students who earn college-level credits in one public institution will be able to transfer those credits to others" (Creech, 1995b, p. 2). Using online sources accessed through the states' homepages, the following summaries of SREB states' transfer policies were prepared to create a context for discussion of Virginia's transfer policy. Major components of the policies are outlined in Table 2. The policies of the SREB states reflect components typical of most state transfer policies.

Alabama (AGSC, 2000).

Created in 1994 by the state legislature, the Alabama Articulation and General Studies Committee was charged with developing a statewide lower division general studies curriculum and articulation agreement, and with studying the need for a common course file for all public colleges and universities. By 1998, the committee had agreed on distribution requirements totaling 41 credits across four core areas of general education, and adopted guidelines and criteria for submitting courses for approval and inclusion in the core. A task force of four-year chief academic officers appointed discipline faculty committees to develop common pre-major, pre-professional and elective courses totaling 19-23 credits to meet core requirements. An appeals process was also established at the state level, and a transfer contact person was appointed at each institution to resolve transfer problems.

The articulation agreement requires the receiving institution to accept up to half of the required baccalaureate degree credits from the two-year colleges, with a guarantee that all credits appropriate to the major will transfer if the core is followed. The
Table 2: Major Components of SREB State Transfer Policies

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Major Components</th>
<th>Unique Characteristics</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alabama (1994)</td>
<td>articulation and general studies committee created by state legislature</td>
<td>state-level appeals process</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>guaranteed acceptance of distribution requirements</td>
<td>valid only if student does not change majors</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(41 credits in four core areas)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>pre-major core requirements developed by discipline faculty committees</td>
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<td>contacts appointed at each institution</td>
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<td></td>
<td>equal credit requirements for transfer and native students</td>
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<tr>
<td>Arkansas (1994)</td>
<td>legislative mandate to develop transferable minimum core requirements</td>
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<td></td>
<td>satisfaction of general education requirements with the associate in arts degree</td>
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<td></td>
<td>guaranteed admissions if requirements of articulation agreement are met</td>
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<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>Major Components</td>
<td>Unique Characteristics</td>
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<tr>
<td>Delaware</td>
<td>institutional policies governing transfer</td>
<td>transferability based on criterion referenced proficiency as well as course content</td>
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<td>transfer credits evaluated course-by-course</td>
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<td></td>
<td>student responsibility to document course equivalencies</td>
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<td>Florida (1995)</td>
<td>guaranteed admission for associate degree graduates</td>
<td>CLAST test required to enroll in upper-level Courses</td>
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<td>priority given to community college graduates over</td>
<td>“articulated acceleration” through credits awarded on the basis of examinations</td>
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<td>out-of-state transfers</td>
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<td></td>
<td>statewide articulation coordinating committee</td>
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<td></td>
<td>common course numbering system</td>
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<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>core curriculum of 60 credits in six core areas</td>
<td>courses meeting core requirements determined by each institution</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>blocks of courses transfer for each core</td>
<td>valid only if student does not change majors</td>
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<td></td>
<td>only common course name and number guaranteed</td>
<td>core area of prerequisites related to specific majors</td>
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<td>full credit if core not completed</td>
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<td></td>
<td>equal credit requirements for transfer and native</td>
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<td></td>
<td>students</td>
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<td>State</td>
<td>Major Components</td>
<td>Unique Characteristics</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kentucky</td>
<td>Kentucky Community and Technical College System (KCTCS) created in 1997</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(no transfer policy available)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Louisiana</td>
<td>course equivalencies determined through collaboration between institutions</td>
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<td></td>
<td>general education credit requirements</td>
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<td></td>
<td>established by Board of Regents</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maryland (1997)</td>
<td>Student Transfer Advisory Committee (STAC) established by Higher Education Commission</td>
<td>ARTSYS - electronic data information system to map course equivalencies and program requirements</td>
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<td></td>
<td>statutory regulations defining statewide guidelines and standards for transfer of a general education core</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mississippi (1988)</td>
<td>statewide articulation agreement between state boards for two- and four-year institutions</td>
<td>general education requirements articulated for 158 different majors</td>
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Table 2: Major Components of SREB State Transfer Policies (continued)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Major Components</th>
<th>Unique Characteristics</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mississippi</td>
<td>statewide articulation committee that reviews agreement annually</td>
<td>institutional articulation agreements allowing additional courses to transfer</td>
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<tr>
<td>North Carolina</td>
<td>legislatively mandated Comprehensive Articulation Agreement (CAA)</td>
<td>common course catalog for community colleges</td>
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<td>block transfer of common general education core of 44 credits</td>
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<td>course-by-course equivalencies if core is not completed</td>
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<td>joint discipline committees and agreement on lower-division requirements for the major</td>
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<td>electronic/printed transfer information system</td>
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Table 2: Major Components of SREB State Transfer Policies (continued)

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<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Major Components</th>
<th>Unique Characteristics</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oklahoma (1997)</td>
<td>satisfaction of lower-division requirements by associate degree graduates</td>
<td>requirement for applied degrees to include transfer courses</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Course Equivalency Project (CEP) that matches courses by generic titles, prefix and numbers</td>
<td>accuracy of matrices not guaranteed</td>
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<td>equivalency groups defined and information distributed by Regents</td>
<td>transfer problem hotline for referrals</td>
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<tr>
<td>South Carolina</td>
<td>legislatively mandated statewide agreement</td>
<td>additional testing or validation prohibited</td>
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<tr>
<td>(1996)</td>
<td>transfer blocks of courses for six major areas</td>
<td>state-level accountability for course quality and transferability</td>
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<td></td>
<td>no guarantee of junior status for two-year graduates</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tennessee (1999)</td>
<td>work-in-progress on transfer and articulation Report to include block core of 32 credits and common course numbering system</td>
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Table 2: Major Components of SREB State Transfer Policies (continued)

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<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Major Components</th>
<th>Unique Characteristics</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>course guide manual published by Higher Education Coordinating Board</td>
<td>voluntary common course numbering system</td>
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<td>transferability based on completion of 45 credit core rather than the two-year degree</td>
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<td>requirement to identify core courses on students' transcripts</td>
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<td>funding penalties for non-compliance</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>disputes unresolved in 45 days are resolved the Commissioner</td>
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<tr>
<td>Virginia (1991)</td>
<td>agreement between State Council of Higher Education and State Board for Community Colleges</td>
<td>satisfaction of lower-division general education requirements guaranteed for associate degree graduates</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>“module” of 35 credits transfers as a block of general education courses without course-by-course evaluation</td>
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Table 2: Major Components of SREB State Transfer Policies (continued)

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<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Major Components</th>
<th>Unique Characteristics</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>State Committee on Transfer to monitor policy</td>
<td>transfer of grades based on receiving institution’s policies</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Implementation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>institutional contacts identified to facilitate transfer</td>
<td>disputes resolved by Chancellor of University and College Systems</td>
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<td></td>
<td>institutional articulation agreements encouraged for applied degree programs</td>
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<tr>
<td>West Virginia</td>
<td>transfer guidelines defined by state code</td>
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<td></td>
<td>junior level status and acceptance of at least 64 credits guaranteed for associate</td>
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<td>degree graduates</td>
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<td></td>
<td>institutional articulation agreements required</td>
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agreement does not guarantee admission to the institution or major of choice and is valid only if the student does not change majors. Nor does the agreement guarantee transferability of CLEP (College Level Examination Program) or AP (Advanced Placement) or credit for D grades. The core does not have to be completed to earn credit, but all courses must be selected from the approved list. Receiving institutions cannot require from transfer students more credits for graduation than they do for native students in the same program.

Arkansas (Articulation Agreement, 1994).

In response to a legislative mandate, the State Board of Higher Education adopted in 1990 guidelines for developing minimum core requirements for baccalaureate degrees that would be transferable between public institutions. In 1994, an articulation agreement between two- and four-year institutions was adopted to facilitate transfer for Associate in Arts (AA) degree graduates and increase graduation rates. Completion of the AA degree guarantees satisfaction of “the general education requirements of the signatory four-year institutions,” but does not address any additional general education course prerequisites that may be required for the major.

The agreement guarantees admission to a four-year institution when very specific admissions criteria are met: (a) 46 hours of distributed coursework with a 2.0 grade point average (as calculated by the two-year college), (b) no grade lower than a C, and (c) completion of all requirements based on the catalog in effect when the student first enrolled at the community college.

Delaware (Transfer Policies, 2000).

Each institution in Delaware has its own policies governing transfer, but the three
state-supported institutions of higher education participate in a cooperative program based on principles of shared information, avoiding duplication of institutional missions and programs, and minimizing the loss of credit. Transferability of credit is evaluated on a course-by-course basis, unless covered under specific cooperative agreements between the institutions. Although institutions have transfer course equivalency guides, responsibility for documenting course equivalencies is the student’s responsibility.

Completion of the associate degree does not guarantee transfer at the junior level, and course work must be applicable to the program in which the student enrolls at the four-year college. The same policies apply to students transferring into a different degree program within the same institution as well as to students transferring between institutions. Transferability of credits is based on criterion-referenced proficiency requirements as well as comparable course content.

Florida (Florida Statutes, 1995).

Although Florida has been viewed as a leader for some time in developing transfer and articulation policies, the Florida legislature is increasingly concerned over transfer issues from two- to four-year institutions (Bower, 1997). Florida statutes (1995) require all students to take a college level communication and computation skills test (CLAST) as a prerequisite to enrollment in upper division courses. Under a statewide articulation agreement, Associate in Arts degree graduates are guaranteed admission to the upper-division of a state university provided they complete 60 hours, including a minimum of 36 hours in general education courses from an approved core. Admission is not guaranteed to limited access or teacher education programs, or to programs requiring an audition (e.g. performing arts), but priority is given to community college graduates.
over out-of-state applicants.

The statewide Articulation Coordinating Committee set up a common course numbering system for all public and participating private institutions, and concurrent enrollment at two- and four-year colleges is authorized. Under the principle of "articulated acceleration," colleges must provide examinations through which students can earn general education credits (e.g. dual credit) and colleges must have common degree program prerequisites.

Georgia (USG Academic Affairs Handbook, 2000).

The transfer policy of the Board of Regents for the University System of Georgia (USG) is based on ten guiding principles that insure quality and comprehensiveness in educational programs and transferability of courses, while protecting institutional autonomy. The core curriculum consists of 60 credit hours distributed across six core areas, but a unique feature of the policy is that each institution identifies the courses that meet the core requirements. Provided a student does not change majors, all USG institutions are obligated to accept in transfer a completed core area as meeting that core requirement, regardless of whether or not the specific courses used to satisfy the requirement are offered at the receiving institution. If the core has not been completed, the transfer student's transcript is evaluated on a course-by-course basis. Only courses with a common course name and number are guaranteed full credit.

Another unique feature of the policy is the core area of "courses related to the program of study," consisting of lower division courses that are prerequisites for upper division courses in the major field of study. Again, a receiving institution must accept this core as satisfied if the student has completed it at another institution. In other words,
acceptability of courses in the core area is determined by the student’s home campus. The total credits required of transfer students for graduation may not exceed the number required for native students.

Two-year colleges in Georgia are more like traditional junior colleges and are included in the University System. Unlike two-year colleges in other states, they are not called community colleges, and not every community in Georgia has access to one (Bowen, 1997).

Kentucky (KCTCS, 2000).

The Kentucky Community and Technical College System (KCTCS) was created in 1997, and governance for two-year colleges was transferred from the University of Kentucky to the KCTCS Board of Regents. The state’s technical institutions were transferred to KCTCS and local community and technical colleges were consolidated. No information on transfer and articulation was readily available.

Louisiana (General Education, 2000).

Recently, the boards of the various public institutions in Louisiana collaborated to identify course equivalencies for general education, but inclusion of a course only indicates that most public institutions will grant full credit. Equivalent courses are thus generally transferable, but may or may not be applied to a particular degree program or major.

General education requirements, established by the Board of Regents, include 39 credits for baccalaureate degrees and 12 credits for associate degrees, distributed across seven discipline areas. Institutions may add requirements and determine which courses meet the requirements. Transfer is based primarily on institutional articulation.
agreements, and students are encouraged to contact the institution to which they intend to transfer. Maryland (Strategic Plan, 2000).

The Maryland Higher Education Commission replaced the State Board for Higher Education in 1988, and in 1991, the State Board for Community Colleges was abolished and board functions were transferred to the Commission. In 1990, the Student Transfer Advisory Committee (STAC) was established to remove barriers to transfer and create a "seamless educational experience" in the state.

Although not implemented until 1997, the statutory regulations for transfer and articulation set up a comprehensive set of procedures for bringing institutions together to develop a program that meets statewide definitions, guidelines, and standards for general education. The Maryland plan includes: (a) a statewide inter-segmental advisory committee and articulation office, (b) a transfer contact person at each institution, (c) regular meetings of the state's chief academic officers, (d) statewide discipline-based faculty groups, and (e) a statewide policy and strategic plan for articulation and transfer.

The Maryland plan has several unique features. The first is the electronic data information system (ARTSYS) that assists students in identifying course equivalencies and remaining program requirements by entering the courses they have already completed and the institution to which they intend to transfer. Transcripts are also sent electronically from one institution to another. Another unique feature is that the Maryland plan includes course articulation for secondary schools and non-degree granting institutions. It also addresses the special challenges associated with transfer of applied degree programs and inter-disciplinary courses.
The general education program for AA and AS degrees requires 30-36 credits, and four-year institutions can require a maximum of 16 credits more for the baccalaureate degree. Just as in the Georgia plan, Maryland requires institutions to accept the general education core of each public institution without conducting a course-by-course match or further review.

Mississippi (Articulation Agreement, 1998).

The Mississippi Board of Trustees for state institutions and the State Board for Community and Junior Colleges signed an articulation agreement in September 1988. The agreement lists all institutions that have the same major and articulates the general education requirements for 158 programs of study. A statewide articulation committee of chief academic officers and deans meets annually to review and approve all changes to the agreement. Individual colleges may also have separate articulation agreements allowing the transfer of additional courses.

North Carolina (Comprehensive Articulation Agreement, 2000).

Legislation passed in 1995 by the General Assembly mandated the development of an articulation plan between the University of North Carolina and the North Carolina Community College System. The Comprehensive Articulation Agreement (CAA) was approved in 1996 and included a common course catalog for all community colleges, procedures for ensuring good academic advising, and a timetable for developing individual articulation agreements for majors, professional, and applied degree programs.

The key to the plan is the common general education core of 44 credits, which is transferable to all public four-year institutions. Based on the principle that competencies are more important than courses, the block transfer of the core is important. If the core is
not completed, courses are evaluated on a course-by-course basis.

Admission to the institution or to specific majors is not guaranteed, and upper division requirements are not affected by the agreement. The lower division courses required in the major are agreed upon by joint discipline committees and associate degree graduates who are admitted are given junior status with lower division general education requirements fulfilled. Graduates are guaranteed to receive at least 64 credits if they have an overall grade point average of 2.0 and no grades lower than a C in the CAA articulated courses.

Another key component of the CAA is the transfer information system—printed publications and electronic information, electronic transcript exchange, E-mail networks, and Student Academic Performance Reports that are sent to the community colleges to assist them in evaluating and improving the transfer process. Oklahoma (Course Equivalency Project, 2000).

The Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education implemented in 1997 a new comprehensive approach to transfer that guarantees that community college associate degree graduates will have satisfied lower-division general education requirements (a core of 37 credits) at all public institutions. The Regents also required that all two-year degree programs, including applied degrees, include transfer courses by fall 2001. Under consideration is a policy that would allow the awarding of credit for competency-based knowledge and skills in technical areas.

The Course Equivalency Project (CEP) is a matrix distributed by the Regents to provide information about courses offered at public institutions. By using a generic title, prefix, and three-digit numbers, equivalency groups are defined. A course listed in that
group can be transferred as an equivalent course to any institution listed as also offering a course in that equivalency group.

Faculty groups representing all public institutions meet annually to establish course equivalencies, and the matrices are distributed to all institutions in the system. The caveat is that the Regents do not guarantee the accuracy of their lists, but a Course Transfer Problem Hotline was developed to refer students to appropriate institutional contacts to resolve any problems.

South Carolina (Consideration, 1996).

In response to legislation in 1994, 1995, and 1996, the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education (CHE) adopted in 1996 a statewide agreement on transfer and articulation. Development of the agreement was a collaborative effort using statewide task forces and committees to define “transfer blocks” of courses at two-year colleges in: (a) arts, humanities, and social sciences, (b) business administration, (c) engineering, (d) science and mathematics, (e) teacher education, and (f) nursing, that meet the requirements of all public institutions that have that program. Four-year colleges are required to accept the completed block without requiring additional validation such as placement tests or other examinations.

A unique feature of the South Carolina plan is the level of accountability to which colleges are held for the quality of their course offerings and the consistency of their transfer practices. For example, multi-campus institutions and systems are required to “certify by letter to the Commission that all coursework at all of its campuses applicable to a particular degree program of study is fully acceptable in transfer to meet degree requirements in the same degree program at any other of its campuses” (p. 3).
Furthermore,

all claims from any public two- or four-year institution challenging the effective preparation of any other public institution's course work for transfer purposes shall be evaluated and appropriate measures shall be taken to reassure that the quality of the course work has been reviewed and approved on a timely basis by sending and receiving institutions alike. This process of formal review shall occur every four years through the staff of CHE...(p. 5)

One other unique feature of the South Carolina agreement is the compromise reached in the disagreement over whether or not transfer students should be awarded junior status. Two-year college graduates are entitled to junior status for priority in registration, residence hall assignments, parking, and athletic tickets, "and not in calculating academic degree credits" (p. 4).

Tennessee (Tennessee Board of Regents, 1999).

In response to a 1995 Joint Resolution of the General Assembly, the Tennessee Higher Education Commission and the Tennessee Board of Regents appointed a subcommittee to prepare a report on Transfer and Articulation, which was released in June 1999. A subcommittee was charged with developing a plan to facilitate transfer of a general education core, to remove barriers to transfer, and to improve communication.

Still considered a work-in-progress, the report outlines responsibilities of boards, institutions, and students in the transfer process. The subcommittee is in the process of reviewing courses and developing a block core of 32 credits, a common course numbering system, and addressing transfer issues associated with the two-year applied degree.
Texas (Texas Higher Education, 2000).

Most respondents to Bowen's 1997 survey said that transfer and articulation in Texas did not work well because of a lack of emphasis on completing the associate degree, the lack of a common general education core, and the lack of statewide efforts to facilitate transfer. The irony of that finding by the California Higher Education Policy Center is that Texas has had since 1973 a common course numbering system, developed voluntarily—not state-mandated, by community colleges and universities to ease the transfer process.

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board publishes a Lower Division Academic Course Guide Manual of courses and transfer curricula and resolves disputes over the transfer of credits between institutions. Institutions identify equivalents of their courses in the guide, and according to new policy rules implemented in the fall 1999, disputes between institutions that go unresolved for longer than 45 days are resolved by the Commissioner. All lower division courses must be fully transferable to any public institution, and successful completion of a 45 credit minimum core satisfies lower division general education requirements. Courses used to satisfy the core must be identified on the student's transcript. Correspondence courses and credit-by-exam must be treated in the same way, but institutions may deny credit for D grades. When credit is denied by a receiving institution, both the sending institution and the student are notified, and the reasons why are provided. Admission requirements are not addressed in the policy.

A unique feature of the Texas transfer rules is the penalty for non-compliance.

If it is determined by the Coordinating Board that an institution inappropriately or
unnecessarily required a student to retake a course that is substantially equivalent
to a course already taken at another institution... formula funding for credit hours
in the repeated course will be deducted from the institution’s appropriations (p.
2).

If quality of the two-year college course is determined to be the problem, the two-year
college’s funding is affected.

Virginia.

Virginia’s community colleges have historically provided both occupational-
technical and university parallel programs to prepare students to enter the work force or
transfer to a four-year college or university. The state also designated the community
colleges as the appropriate agents for delivering remedial education to enhance students’
readiness for college level study, and for administering dual credit programs for high
school students academically ready to earn college credit while they complete their high
school studies. Because of lower tuition and operating costs of community colleges,
Virginia recognized the potential of transfer for reducing costs, increasing access
(particularly for minorities), avoiding duplication, and improving education quality when
it enacted the State Policy on Transfer in 1991.

Virginia’s policy does not mandate admissions standards, guaranteed admissions
or a common general education core across institution levels. It directs only that
associate degree graduates of university parallel degree programs who are granted
admission should be given junior status and that lower-division general education
requirements should be waived.
West Virginia (State College System, 2000).

West Virginia code in 1992 defined policy guidelines for the transferability of course credits and grades at the undergraduate level. A unique feature of the West Virginia policy is that credits and grades are generally transferable, and the grades used are based on the receiving institution’s policy. Two-year graduates are guaranteed to receive a minimum of 64 credits and junior level status, and should be able to graduate with the same number of credits as a native student in the same major.

West Virginia has both a State College System and a University System of higher education, and colleges and universities are required to develop more detailed articulation agreements. The Chancellor of the State College System resolves disputes over transfer credit, but if the problem is between a state system college and a university system institution, the Chancellor of the receiving institution’s system resolves the problem.

Policy Evaluation—What Works?

Research on community college transfers at the state or public policy level is extremely limited (Eaton, 1994). A review of transfer policy research in the ERIC database since 1988 identified three basic types of descriptive transfer studies: (a) characteristics and performance of transfer students, (b) institutional efforts to improve transfer, or (c) definitions and data on transfer rates. Many of those studies were dated and based on longitudinal studies conducted in 1972 and 1980 by the U.S. Department of Education on high school students who went to college. Few studies were found that attempted to examine the effect of state policies on community college transfers (Banks, 1992; Ratcliff & Jones, 1991; Williams, 1992). A factor contributing to the lack of
policy research is that state transfer policies are a relatively recent phenomenon. As noted previously, most of the SREB states have developed transfer policies since 1994.

Although most states rely on transfer rates as an indicator of productivity and institutional performance, not all states agree on a definition. Transfer rates are considered important because they indicate more than just movement between the segments of higher education; many believe they also imply effectiveness of the transfer and articulation policies and processes (Laman & Sanchez, 1996). Cohen (1995), in a comparative policy study of high and low rates of transfer, based his research on the following restrictive definition of transfer rates: “all students entering the community college in a given year who have no prior college experience and who complete at least twelve college units divided into the number of that group who take one or more classes at an in-state public university within four years” (p. 28).

Cohen (1995) acknowledged a number of weaknesses in this definition, including the fact that it excludes private institutions—institions that are frequently more open to developing voluntary articulation agreements with community colleges. The definition does not consider students’ intentions, graduation year, or enrollment in advanced academic courses or an appropriate college track in high school. No parameters are defined for how long the student took to complete 12 credits, and no distinction is made between academic and vocational courses at the community college. Another problem with Cohen’s definition of a transfer student is that it limits the population to first-time freshmen, but the majority of community college students are not recent high school graduates.

Laman and Sanchez (1996) reviewed several different transfer rate models and
outlined the strengths and weaknesses of each, but the meaning of the transfer rate hinges on what is used as the numerator and the denominator in the ratio. Laman and Sanchez suggested that a more accurate rate would be defined in terms of whether or not a student is eligible to transfer and whether or not the student intended to transfer, instead of who actually transfers.

Using his formula and survey data reported between 1984 and 1990, Cohen's 1995 comparative study of transfer rates documented a 21% national transfer rate, with individual state rates ranging from 11% to 40%. Cohen argued that the wide disparity between states was related to the structure of the state system of higher education. If two-year colleges were vocational-technical schools, rates were low. Cohen also found, however, that within state differences were greater than between state differences in high and low transfer rates, suggesting that factors other than governance affect transfer. The previous discussion of transfer policies in the SREB states, however, demonstrate how state structures for higher education influence the ways in which states address access and efficiency issues in transfer and articulation.

Based on the following criteria, Cohen (1995) found few differences between institutions with high and low transfer rates: (a) articulation agreements, (b) common course numbering systems, (c) faculty/counselor attitudes, (d) presence of honor societies, (e) visits from four-year institutions, (f) faculty exchanges, (g) mandatory orientation, and (h) types of course syllabi. Other institution characteristics did differentiate between high and low rates. Community colleges with high transfer rates had a transfer center staff and an accessible four-year college with low grade point average requirements for admissions. Staff expectations of transfer, a history of high
transfer rates and greater use of institutional research data were also associated with high transfer rates.

In terms of transfer student characteristics, students from high rate institutions indicated transfer as their objective in attending the community college. Students from low rate community colleges enrolled for the purpose of moving directly into the labor market. Students from institutions with high transfer rates felt the community college emphasized transfer; students from institutions with low rates saw the emphasis on both transfer and occupational-technical education. A majority of students in both types of institutions thought transfer should be the emphasis and most expected to transfer to a four-year college within three years. Surveys of faculty and administrators reflected similar results, and administrators at a community college with high transfer rates believed they had an institutional culture that supported transfer. Administrators from two-year institutions with low transfer rates were more likely to blame four-year institution admissions practices or the lack of student interest in transfer for their low rates (Cohen, 1995).

Other studies of institutional characteristics of high and low transfer rates showed similar results. Orfield and Paul (1992) found that when a community college serves as a popular mechanism for access to the four-year institution, bachelor degree graduation rates are depressed. Orfield and Paul compared Florida and California, states with a heavy reliance on community colleges for access to higher education, to Indiana, Wisconsin, and Illinois, states with more accessible four-year institutions. The study examined transfer and baccalaureate completion rates in each of these states between 1975 and 1988, but the data were not analyzed in the context of state policies that affect
admissions and acceptance of credits.

Mabry (cited in Cohen, 1995) found that transfer rates in states with both comprehensive and technical colleges depend on the amount of focus the community college places on occupational-technical education, but he could not determine the influence of state policy on those results. Cohen (1995) concluded from his study that "student flow is a local responsibility; it seems only tangentially related to state policies...One who would understand college outcomes should look to the single college as the unit of analysis" (p. 34).

Up until the 1960s, most states lacked systematic policies for articulation (Prager, 1994). Some states, such as Florida and Illinois, mandated policies and procedures in the 1970s. Prager (1994) reported that Georgia, New Jersey, Massachusetts, and Oklahoma had policies by the mid-1970s and that, by 1990, at least thirty states had adopted policies for transfer from associate to baccalaureate degrees. Nevertheless, Prager could not cite any follow-up studies by those states that examined the policies' effectiveness. Most studies of articulation described policies, practices, and the mechanics of transfer, and did not assess the effectiveness of state policy in achieving results.

Although most states have guidelines, policies, or system wide agreements concerning transfer, no positive correlation has been documented between transfer rates and articulation agreements (Eaton, 1994). "At most, based on the evidence available, we can maintain that articulation agreements may help and do not harm transfer. On the other hand, when preoccupation with articulation agreements precludes other institutional actions that might strengthen transfer, they may be harmful" (Eaton, 1994, p. 35). According to Eaton, a major weakness of most articulation agreements is that they
ensure only that a certain number of credits will transfer, not that specific courses will transfer as meeting university requirements. Students may be faced with having to retake courses when four-year college faculty do not accept community college courses as equivalent in content or in standards of performance.

Results of a Louisiana study in 1991 did not support the efficacy of a common course numbering system or of a statewide general education core (Ratcliff & Jones, 1991). A 1992 study of seventy-eight colleges in fifteen states (primarily from Texas and California) found that statewide policies had only a moderate positive effect on transfer rates (Banks, 1992). Although a 1991 study (Summative Review, 1991) of the Associate in Arts degree program in Florida's community colleges showed that two-thirds of the graduates transferred to a four-year institution, a policy study in 1992 on the effect of limited access programs on articulation policies showed a decline in community college transfers (Williams, 1992). These studies are now somewhat dated, and were limited to studies of transfer rates. None of these studies examined results in the context of policy goals or intent—did the policy produce the results intended?

Although not a systematic research study, an article in the August 7, 1999, Los Angeles Times concluded that California's transfer policies reinforce inequities rather than facilitate transfer for minorities and the economically disadvantaged (Leovy, 1999). The author conducted interviews with students and found that many attended community colleges that did not emphasize transfer to the University of California, so students were not advised or encouraged to transfer. Transfer depended on which community college the student attended—a finding consistent with the literature on transfer behavior.

The key question that is not answered in the literature is what is the relationship
of state-level transfer policy to its intended results? What should happen as a result?

How is the policy implemented and experienced at the institutional level?

A Theoretical Framework for Examining Transfer Policy

Not only is there a lack of research on the impact of state transfer and articulation policies, but

two- to four-year curriculum continuity continues to suffer from the absence of a theory of curriculum articulation serving transfer with sufficient flexibility to allow for institutional differences... At present, the closest we have to a theory of curriculum articulation involves the transferability and assessment of competencies in addition to earned credit. If blanket acceptance of the associate in arts or science moves too far in the direction of avoiding discussion of commonly agreed upon competencies, blanket competency testing runs the danger of subjecting the community colleges and their graduates to special forms of scrutiny, unless applied equally to all students who wish to undertake baccalaureate track studies, native and transfer (Prager, 1994, p. 498).

One of the weaknesses of the current construct of articulation is that it is hierarchical (Prager, 1994). In using concepts such as "upper division" and "lower division" and "junior" and "senior" institutions, the implication is that the four-year institution by rights of superiority has control over the curriculum (Prager, 1994; Eaton, 1994). As one response to this criticism, Eaton proposed an "academic model" approach to transfer that requires two- and four-year college faculty to cooperate to ensure a fit between curriculum content and performance standards. The key, argued Eaton, is in faculty working together within and across institutions to develop discipline-based,
interdisciplinary and general education courses as a shared responsibility. Although Eaton called for tracking studies to evaluate the effectiveness of the model for strengthening transfer, she cited no research or anecdotal information on how this model was implemented and with what level of success.

The scant research on the impact of state policies has focused on definitions of the concepts "articulation" and "transfer," but Guba (1984) argued convincingly in an article on the outcomes of policy analysis that "varying interpretations of the word policy greatly affect how and where particular policies are created and implemented and, ultimately, whether their results are as intended" (p. 63). In other words, by applying different definitions to the word "policy," researchers will produce different policy questions, different data sources, methods and analyses, and different outcomes resulting from policy implementation. Guba's framework was described in Chapter 1 and outlined in Table 1.

The usefulness of this approach to an investigation of transfer policy is also that it can be applied to address the values and concerns of all stakeholders—policy makers, education institutions, students and their parents. For example, based on Guba's (1984) three policy types (and eight policy definitions), policy makers may interpret policy as policy-in-intention, which describes the intended purposes of the policy (the policy will...). Implementers of policy within education institutions may subscribe to a definition of policy as Guba's policy-in-action—what should happen as a result of policy implementation. Finally, parents and students may interpret policy in terms of Guba's third policy type—policy-in-experience, or what the student actually experiences in trying to transfer to the four-year institution (the policy does... or the policy is).
Analyses of state policies that focus on transfer rates only make assumptions that institutions are in compliance with the policy and that students follow the appropriate paths for transfer. Guba’s (1984) conceptual framework allows the researcher to examine also the effects of policy outcomes when institutions and students do not follow the policy as intended, thus providing richer information for examining the policy’s impact, and allowing the possibility that the policy is effective at one or more levels (intention, action, or experience).

Although educators normally do not choose to think of education in political terms, higher education operates in a political environment, and studies of higher education need to include public policy issues. Coombs (n.d.) proposed a typology of education policy issues.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy Area</th>
<th>Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Financial</td>
<td>Who should pay? How much? What is the return?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curricular</td>
<td>What should be taught?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access</td>
<td>Which students should have access to which programs?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedagogy</td>
<td>How should students be taught?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty</td>
<td>Who is qualified to teach? What is the faculty’s role?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governance</td>
<td>Who should make policy? Who should be held accountable?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

State policies for transfer and articulation cut across all of these public policy issues. At the state level, policy makers are interested in allocation and accountability issues related to increasing demands for decreasing resources. At the campus level, policy implementers are interested in facilitating transfer by alleviating the need for students to duplicate course work, and in increasing access to educational opportunities by preparing...
students for higher level studies. Both at the state and the institutional levels, quality of education is a primary concern. Policy researchers' understandings of the why and the effects of transfer policies contribute to better policy decisions, provide viable solutions to problems, and ensure that institutions are doing the right things to serve the public's education needs.

Lincoln (1990) pointed out that "most educational decisions are made in a political environment, with contested values implicitly or explicitly guiding choices made and priorities set" (p. 16). Values and priorities, in Guba's (1984) framework, depend on whether policy is defined as intent, action, or experience. Although legislators may intend to make higher education more accessible and efficient by mandating articulation, in action, state transfer policies also pose a potential threat to faculty autonomy and academic freedom when they mandate admissions or curricular requirements. In experience, policy implementation may be resisted. Policy makers, the higher education community, and students and their parents benefit from research on the impact of state policy and its effectiveness in achieving its goals.

After almost a decade of policy development and implementation, what has been Virginia's experience with the state transfer policy? To what extent has it been successful in meeting the policy objectives? If the policy is perceived as having little impact, assessment results could be used by legislators to argue for more standardization and control to achieve intended outcomes. But if effective, Virginia's policy could serve as a model for less intrusive state transfer policies.

A History of Transfer in Virginia

The history of transfer from two-year to four-year colleges in Virginia can be
characterized by three major themes: academic elitism, institutional autonomy, and avoiding costly duplication of efforts through diversity of institutional missions. As early as 1928, studies of higher education in the state focused on duplication and problems associated with a lack of central coordination.

A study published in 1928, Public Education in Virginia: Report to the Educational Commission of Virginia of a Survey of the Public Educational System of the State, looked at state education policies and the distinguishing characteristics of education in Virginia (O'Shea, 1928). Noting that “sectional independence and rivalry have been unduly strong in Virginia,” O'Shea attributed the struggle for power and influence between higher education institutions to the isolation imposed by Virginia's geography and their historical founding as private institutions (O'Shea, 1928, p. 25). Nevertheless, he argued that “cooperation among the higher institutions should be insisted upon” and recommended the appointment of a Chancellor for a unified system of higher education to meet the needs of the state and curb institutions’ tendency toward expansion (O'Shea, 1928, p. 26).

O'Shea’s survey results showed that the citizens of Virginia were opposed to “providing higher education at public expense for all the young people of the state who wish to pursue a collegiate course,” and documented citizens’ complaints about unnecessary duplication of courses in “higher institutions” (O'Shea, 1928, p. 23). At the same time, O'Shea noted that “Virginia [was] not caring adequately for its young people who [were] not able to undertake collegiate work,” and yet recommended that the time was not right for Virginia to develop two-year junior colleges as additions to high schools because too many other educational needs were going unmet (O'Shea, 1928, p.
Furthermore, O'Shea argued, junior colleges attached to local high schools only extended students' dependency and contributed to a lack of self-reliance. Students should leave home if they wished to continue their education, and since private colleges that operated like junior colleges already existed in the state, there was no need for duplication (O'Shea, 1928).

The recommendations made in the 1928 report were meant to protect institutional autonomy while ensuring that the needs of the state would be met. If a chancellor was not created, argued O'Shea, then legislation should be enacted to accomplish the following goals: (a) restricting the liberal arts to institutions like the College of William and Mary and the University of Virginia; (b) discontinuing low enrollment classes; (c) determining which courses of study should be taught at which institutions; (d) improving quality rather than expanding the range of courses offered; (e) focusing solely on the needs of Virginia citizens; (f) setting high standards for admission to college; and (g) providing vocational education at Virginia Military Institute rather than developing junior colleges (O'Shea, 1928).

At the request of then Governor George C. Peery, a report written in 1936 by W. H. Stauffer addressed the issues of scholarships, student loans, and the unit costs of instruction for the ten state-supported colleges (University of Virginia, the College of William and Mary, Virginia Polytechnic Institute, the Medical College of Virginia, the Virginia Military Institute, the State College for Negroes, and the four state teachers' colleges at Harrisonburg, Fredericksburg, Farmville, and Radford). Noting extreme variations in costs for the same curricula, Stauffer's report called for better planning and for a study of the relative financial needs of the institutions. "Ideally, the financial
obligation of the state should not extend beyond an amount sufficient to prepare for active service that number of students needed for the service of the state” (Stauffer, 1936, p. 38). In other words, there are limits to what the state should support, and better coordination of institutions would minimize “the extravagances of unnecessary overlapping” (Stauffer, 1936, p. 61).

Studies in 1945, 1947, and 1951 proposed that institutions should be centrally coordinated in a system of higher education for the Commonwealth. But again in 1951, the General Assembly called for a study of state-supported higher education institutions focused on operational inefficiencies and duplication of efforts in instruction. In response to HJR 47, the Virginia Advisory Legislative Council’s report once again discussed the effects of Virginia’s failure to develop a state-wide system of education: (a) institutions’ interest in the welfare of the institution rather than the welfare of the state; (b) competition rather than cooperation among institutions; (c) expansion of offerings and program and course duplication; and (d) problems in teacher training.

But the 1951 report also identified an urgent need for “short technical and semi-professional courses to prepare for the many types of callings which require post-high school training but do not require four-year curricula” (Virginia Advisory Legislative Council, 1951, pp. 4-5). Consultants’ recommendations included “lengthening the general education program and expanding the opportunities for the education of adults” (p. 20)—in other words, creating the comprehensive community college. “Unless the state decides to establish community colleges under public school auspices, the comprehensive university must establish either day or evening technical and semi-professional classes in communities within reach of the people who want such
In spite of thirty years of recommendations to coordinate a system of higher education in the state, nothing was done. Rather, a 1955 study, *The Crisis in Higher Education in Virginia and a Solution*, called for extending educational opportunities to students who could not afford to attend colleges and universities. The report noted that, compared to other states, a small proportion of the state's population was college-educated. The solution, argued the advisory council, was to create local two-year branches of existing institutions and a board to coordinate all of higher education.

These extensions were to offer courses primarily for adult education. They were not intended to be adequate for providing the first two years of degree programs (*Virginia Advisory Legislative Council, 1955*). In fact, the council argued against the creation of community colleges, citing problems with accreditation and maintaining quality standards. The fear was that local communities would tend to demand more than what the colleges could provide, and that two-year colleges might want to expand to four-year institutions regardless of the need to do so (*Virginia Advisory Legislative Council, 1955*). Interestingly, the report endorsed the state's twelve private two-year (junior) colleges.

The 1955 report supported branch university centers rather than independent community colleges. Quality assurance could be maintained if the two-year branches were associated with a parent institution and students could then transfer with full credit to the parent institution. These branches would be less costly for the state to operate and less expensive for the students because there would be no need to build residence halls. Students could complete their general education living at home and then specialize at the four-year institutions. The report argued that branch campuses would be supported by
the public because they met local needs, and "the reputation of the parent institution [was] the student's assurance that he [would] receive proper credit for his studies at the branch" (p. 12). Finally, the report maintained that two years of course work could become a terminal program for students who did not go on to complete a baccalaureate degree—students who would otherwise take up slots at the four-year institutions.

Based on recommendations first proposed in a 1950 study, the State Council for Higher Education in Virginia was created in 1956 to: (a) develop a Virginia Plan, (b) approve programs, (c) conduct statewide policy studies, (d) project enrollments, (e) review institutions' biennial budgets, and (f) provide assistance to colleges in reporting, data analysis and interpretation. And by 1965, 11 public two-year branch campuses were operating in Virginia. Five were associated with the University of Virginia, four were associated with Virginia Polytechnic Institute, and William and Mary parented two branch campuses. A separate board had been established in 1964 to govern the states' two-year technical colleges, which were separate from the vocational-technical programs operated under the local school systems.

Evidence of obstacles to transfer was evident in 1965. Virginia's academic elitism and the strong autonomy of its colleges and universities were reflected in a 1965 report of the Higher Education Study Commission. Although a 1955 report had argued that students on branch campuses would be assured they could transfer with full credit to the parent institution, Russell (1965) noted that "students at Mary Washington College (a branch of the University of Virginia for women) [were] treated the same as those from any other college in the country on applications for transfer to the University at Charlottesville" (p. 14).
There is suspicion in some quarters that the main interest of the University in maintaining Mary Washington College as a branch with enrollment limited to women students is to prevent pressure for a coeducational program in undergraduate arts and sciences at Charlottesville (Russell, 1965, p. 15).

In response to a Senate Joint Resolution, the 1965 Higher Education Study Commission evaluated the needs, resources, and objectives of Virginia’s institutions, and developed a long range plan that met the growing demand for higher education in the state, yet maintained the unique character and contributions of the Commonwealth’s colleges and universities (Russell, 1965). It further “gave birth” to the community colleges in Virginia— institutions that would provide post-secondary, terminal vocational and technical training and two-year college transfer programs.

Transfer was intended to be a significant part of the mission of community colleges. Recommendation 9 in Russell’s 1965 report stated this clearly, and Recommendation 10 stressed the unique character of the community college.

**Recommendation 9.** The state council of higher education for Virginia should be the agency through which the system of community colleges is coordinated with the remainder of the publicly controlled programs of higher education in Virginia. The SCHEV should promote effective articulation between the community colleges and the senior institutions, public and private, possibly by arranging for the appointment of a joint committee to promote cooperation in such matters as the transfer of students from community colleges to senior colleges, the mutual use of examinations or other measures of achievement, interchange of instruction and services, and other matters of common concern (Russell, 1965, p. 28).
Recommendation 10. The SCHEV should adopt policies and regulations to protect and preserve the identity of the two-year community college. It should be the policy of the state to authorize the establishment of a new four-year state-controlled college in a locality only if and after a two-year community college has been in successful operation there. If the need is demonstrated in such a community for an educational program above the two-year college level, a separate institution should be established for the purpose. In such case, the two-year community college should be continued, and should maintain the unique educational services it has customarily provided (Russell, 1965, p. 28).

The first priority in the Commission report was to establish a community college system, and subsequent recommendations made it clear that establishing the two-year colleges would allow the four-year institutions to maintain selective admissions. Community colleges would not be allowed to compete with existing colleges and universities. For example, the second priority in the Commission report was to create a four-year college (George Mason College) from a two-year branch of the University of Virginia in northern Virginia. George Mason College was intended to be something other than a highly selective liberal arts school. The commission envisioned a “service university” with “democratic admissions” focused on undergraduate education—similar to Old Dominion in Norfolk—a two-year branch of the College of William and Mary. But “with the development of good community colleges in its area, its admissions policies could become increasingly selective at the freshman level” (Russell, 1965, p. 33). Clearly, the conversion of Arlington’s technical school into a community college was tied directly to the development of a four-year college.
The same rationale was used in the development of a four-year college in Newport News. When the technical college in the city was converted to a community college, Christopher Newport College became another four-year "service" college with "democratic admissions". The Commission report went on to say that due consideration might well be given to the establishment of the reorganized Christopher Newport College as an upper division institution, without the usual freshman and sophomore subjects, since subjects in the first two college years would be available nearby in the recommended community college (p. 36).

The fifth priority would create Norfolk State out of a two-year branch of Virginia State College, but the Commission was in no hurry to recommend that Mary Washington, a two-year branch of the University of Virginia for women, become a four-year institution.

The Commission recommended that "the policy of the state should be to provide every high school graduate who wants a college education the opportunity to prove he or she can successfully carry a program of college-level studies" (Russell, 1965, p. 54). Community colleges were to provide that opportunity so that four-year colleges could maintain more selective admissions for freshmen (Russell, 1965). And in the case of the University of Virginia's extension of general education classes in Roanoke, the Commission recommended that the new community college house the University of Virginia extension center.

The 1965 Higher Education Study Commission Report consisted of several separate staff reports focused on various aspects of Virginia's system of higher education. A.J. Brumbaugh's Report Number 4 focused on the "community junior college" in Virginia. The 1965 report provided a lengthy description of the existing two-year
institutions in the state—both the junior colleges and the public colleges affiliated with a four-year institution, and concluded that the problems with the public institutions were the result of a lack of coordination or consistency in the level of control over them, and the limitations of their academic program offerings and library collections. Although the faculty identified themselves with the parent institutions, they were often young and less experienced than those at the four-year colleges or private junior colleges (Brumbaugh, 1965).

Seventy-five percent of enrollments in the public two-year colleges were from the surrounding areas, and the colleges enrolled 10% of the total college enrollments in the state (Brumbaugh, 1965). Of significance, however, was the point that almost 80% of those enrolled in state-controlled two-year colleges were enrolled in transfer programs (Brumbaugh, 1965). The exception was the Roanoke Technical Institute, affiliated with Virginia Polytechnic Institute.

The branches provide a means of reducing student congestion on the main campus and of identifying those who, by virtue of interest and ability, should be encouraged to pursue advanced study. The branch program, if properly organized, can provide an honorable terminus by granting the degree of AA or AS to those whose records are satisfactory but who for some reason cannot enter upon further study (Brumbaugh, 1965, p. 91).

The report projected significant savings to the state by accommodating freshmen and sophomores in public two-year rather than four-year institutions, and proximity to a four-year college was an important consideration in the plan to develop a system of community colleges (Brumbaugh, 1965). Nevertheless, the new comprehensive colleges
would subsume not only the transfer function of selected affiliated colleges, but also the
diversified programs offered in the post-secondary technical colleges. Under the plan,
post-high school programs would be controlled by a single state board and coordinated
through the Council of Higher Education.

With the creation of the community college system in 1965, steps were taken to
facilitate transfer from the public two-year colleges to four-year institutions in the state.
In 1967, guidelines were approved by the State Council and endorsed by the General
Professional Advisory Committee to smooth the transfer process. A seventeen member
Articulation Advisory Committee was established with faculty and administrators from
two-year and four-year institutions and ten guidelines were developed for the following.

1. systematic procedures to distribute transfer information to counselors and
   advisors;
2. encouraging two-year college students to choose a four-year college early in
   their enrollment;
3. weighing heavily community college performance in admissions decisions;
4. stating transfer admissions standards clearly;
5. evaluating applicants from new, non-accredited community colleges in the same
   way as others;
6. clarifying through transcript evaluation what students need to complete the
   baccalaureate degree;
7. assuring associate degree graduates upper division standing under normal
   circumstances;
8. using achievement and aptitude testing to pace students appropriately at the
four-year college;

9. providing the option of satisfying the baccalaureate requirements in effect when the applicant was a freshman at the community college; and

10. conducting semi-annual meetings of the advisory committee to make recommendations to SCHEV.

Two of the 1967 guidelines were amended in December 1969. Applicants from new community colleges—those with SCHEV institutional approval, would be evaluated the same as others. And although applicants normally should have been assured of upper division standing, this did not mean that all credits would be transferred unconditionally. In addition, two new guidelines were adopted that encouraged community college students to complete the associate degree before transferring, but provided the possibility of transfer after one year at the community colleges under unusual circumstances (SCHEV, 1969). Final revisions to the guidelines were completed in June 1972 when verbiage was added to encourage community college students to graduate “except in specialized curricula where it would be to the student’s advantage to transfer earlier” (VCCS Policy Manual, 1999).

The State Council for Higher Education in Virginia published in December 1967 the first master plan for higher education in the state. The focus of the plan was on the growth of enrollments as a result of growing numbers of college-age youth in the state. Calling on four-year colleges to accept graduates from community colleges, the plan noted that “increases in two-year college graduates serve to enlarge the upper division enrollments of the baccalaureate institutions” (p. 20). But apparently not all four-year colleges and universities were expected to accept transfers. Describing institutional roles
and functions, the 1967 Virginia Plan noted "it is desirable for Madison to give special consideration to educating a significant number of transfers from community colleges. In particular... to prepare such transfers for teaching and other careers" (p. 20). Assuring a smooth transition for community college students was a shared responsibility between two-year and four-year institutions. "...The college transfer curricula of all of these institutions [should be] planned and operated in a manner which will insure student transferability into senior institutions" (p. 42). Originally intended as a ten-year document, the 1967 Virginia Plan was revised in 1974 and became a biennial document for continuous planning.

In 1957, there had been 14 public two-year colleges in the state, but by 1974, 23 community colleges had been established. Together, these institutions accounted for one-third of the higher education enrollments in the state (SCHEV, 1974). The number of private two-year colleges had dropped from ten in 1967 to six in 1974, although some had become four-year institutions (SCHEV, 1974).

Whereas the focus of the 1967 plan was on enrollment growth, the focus of the 1974 plan was diversity—a key to understanding higher education in Virginia. The 1974 document for the first time used the terms accessibility, excellence, and accountability as issues in higher education (SCHEV, 1974). The first goal stated for the system dealt with the issue of transfer.

Participation in the system should likewise not be hindered on the basis of any artificial barriers. Moreover, the higher education community should make it possible for a student to transfer from one form or level of post-secondary education to other forms or levels, depending upon his interests and abilities.
In 1965, Brumbaugh reported that 80% percent of the students in public two-year institutions were enrolled in transfer programs, but by 1974, only 30% of community college students were seeking transfer degrees (SCHEV, 1974). To encourage more transfer activity, the 1974 Virginia Plan outlined several actions to be taken by SCHEV to assist state-controlled colleges and universities in developing: (a) a plan that guarantees a community college graduate (AA or AS degree) will be admitted to a four-year college to pursue a degree program for which he is qualified and in which space is available; (b) "a full credit transfer policy," and (c) "a transfer policy for holders of the AAS degree" (p. 25).

The roles and responsibilities of four-year institutions were further clarified by the plan. Four-year institutions were not to "offer two-year degree programs or off-campus lower-level courses" (SCHEV, 1974, p. 41). Again, duplication was to be avoided.

In 1976, the General Assembly in Virginia directed SCHEV to develop agreements for the "orderly" transfer of credits, and 12 out of 15 four-year institutions developed transfer guides outlining course equivalencies (SCHEV, 1977). Four of the senior institutions granted community college graduates full admission at the junior level. At the same time, SCHEV committed to getting data and encouraging the development of a comprehensive policy for transfer of the AAS degree (SCHEV, 1977). Data showed that between 1970-71 and 1975-76, the percentage of two-year transfer degrees awarded by community colleges declined, and the percentage of occupational-technical degrees awarded increased. SCHEV attributed part of this to the fact that students appeared to be
transferring before completing the transfer degree.

The 1979 Virginia Plan for Higher Education focused on the state’s limited resources for higher education and the need to avoid duplication and “add-ons” throughout the system. The document made no mention of SCHEV efforts related to transfer, except to encourage Norfolk State to develop articulation agreements with local community colleges for occupational-technical degrees “as a distinctive part of Norfolk State University’s mission” (SCHEV, 1979, p. 29). But the 1979 plan also noted that urban universities and community colleges were competing for the same pool of students, and suggested that in SCHEV’s 1981 master plan “it may be appropriate to recommend, for instance, that senior institutions reduce their freshman and sophomore enrollments, or that the community colleges discontinue their liberal arts and sciences college transfer programs” (SCHEV, 1979, p. 30). The emphasis of Virginia’s community colleges clearly should be on the occupational-technical programs and in serving the increasing population of older, part-time students with limited mobility.

SCHEV’s 1981 Virginia Plan did not address the recommendations of the 1979 plan to examine the relationship between community colleges and the urban institutions. Although it noted the achievement of the 1974 goal of accessibility, transfer was not mentioned in the plan. Rather, the issues of concern were demands put on colleges and universities to offer programs without regard for duplication, changes in the student population, and declining state revenues for higher education (SCHEV, 1981).

But while Virginia’s plans for higher education dealt less and less with transfer issues, other studies served to attract attention to the need for better information on transfer. Produced as a draft document in 1983 by the Office of the Secretary of
Education, Transfer Policies and Practices: VCCS to Virginia’s State-Supported Colleges
and Universities provided “a comprehensive guide to course requirements and transfer
regulations” (p. iii). Recognizing that lists of course equivalencies for each institution
would be cumbersome to maintain, the document was intended to be an annual
publication that was reexamined every year (Casteen, 1983).

The document was divided into three sections. Section I outlined admissions
policies and entrance requirements at the four-year institutions, including fees, financial
aid, and deadlines. In spite of the previously adopted “Articulation Guidelines” (1967,
1969, 1972), all four-year colleges required transfer students to meet current catalog
requirements for graduation, and not the requirements in effect when the student
matriculated at the community college. Section V also included lists of four-year
academic programs offered and the formal articulation agreements in effect between
two- and four-year institutions.

Section II of the guide outlined how specific community college degree programs
transferred to the four-year institutions, and Section III listed course equivalencies. The
guide was too cumbersome to maintain, however, and students were advised to contact
four-year colleges individually for copies of the institutions’ transfer guides.

In the late 1980s, the transfer issues of academic elitism, institutional autonomy,
and duplication were overshadowed by the issues of assessing transfer student
performance, the availability of accurate transfer data, and improving the transfer and
graduation rates of African-American students.

Senate Joint Resolution 125, passed by the 1985 Virginia General Assembly,
directed the Council of Higher Education “to investigate means by which student
achievement may be measured to assure the citizens of Virginia the continuing high quality of higher education in the Commonwealth.” The study was presented to the 1986 General Assembly as Senate Document No. 14. In Senate Joint Resolution 83, the Assembly accepted the recommendations made in the study and requested institutions of higher education in the state “to establish assessment programs to measure student achievement” (VCCS, 1990, Attachment A, p. 1).

To date, no statewide studies of transfers from community colleges have been published, other than an annual report of the numbers reported by four-year institutions of students who were admitted each fall as transfers from two-year colleges. To assist colleges in their institutional assessment efforts, SCHEV issued in April 1987 ten guidelines for developing comprehensive and coherent assessment plans, and Guideline 8 charged the four-year institutions with providing progress reports to the Council on community college transfer students, including grade point averages, graduation information, and the number of credits transferred. Thirteen years later, however, the difficulties in compiling accurate statewide data and systematically reporting on the performance of transfer students have not been resolved. Two major obstacles to studies of transfer students are the lack of a standard definition for a community college transfer student and a lack of agreement on the data elements that should be analyzed and compared.

Another transfer related issue was first highlighted in 1983 when the State Council developed a program to improve the rate of baccalaureate degree completion for black students (McLean, 1988). Based on national studies that showed over forty percent
of blacks who enter higher education first matriculate at a two-year college, the Council in 1988 proposed a program to strengthen the transfer function for African-American students at Virginia's community colleges. The primary objective of the program was to increase the number of black community college students who transferred and completed a baccalaureate degree. The four major components of the program were: (a) a plan for remediation, (b) transfer agreements, (c) a plan for increasing awareness of transfer opportunities, and (d) development of a transfer guide (McLean, 1988).

In spite of efforts to address two-year college transfer student issues, coordination of a statewide plan to deal with related problems did not occur until October 1990, when SCHEV and the Virginia Community College System (VCCS) approved the establishment of a joint committee on transfer. Following a year of study that included a statewide conference and open hearings on transfer across the Commonwealth, the committee proposed the adoption of a state policy on transfer. SCHEV and the VCCS endorsed the policy in 1991. The committee hoped that as a result of implementing the policy "students [would] be able to move through Virginia's public education system as if it were a continuum, rather than a system of distinct levels or separate stages" (McCartan, 1991, p. 1).

Included in the committee's recommendations is a request that the Council establish a standing advisory committee on transfer and articulation...to ensure that the transfer policy is implemented and that on-going issues regarding the smooth and orderly transfer of students will be addressed (McCartan, 1991, p. 1).

Further evidence of a strong interest in creating a "seamless web" for education was reflected in a 1993 SCHEV report to the Governor and the General Assembly of
Virginia. House Document No. 11, titled The Continuum of Education, was written to respond to House Joint Resolution No. 211, Appropriations Act Item 151, and House Joint Resolution No. 142—all of which “asked the Council of Higher Education to study the obstacles that slow or stop students as they progress from high school through college” (Miller, 1993, p. 1). Citing increases since the 1960s in the length of time required to earn a baccalaureate degree, the report examined the obstacles that slow student progress to the degree and recommended ways student progress could be facilitated (Miller, 1993).

Three recommendations from that report had strong implications for the transfer function of the community colleges. The first was that most remediation should be done in the community colleges. The message was that not everyone should have access to higher education in Virginia. Even open-door admission to the community college should have parameters to assure that only those students most likely to succeed would be permitted to enroll in higher education.

Second, the report recommended that two-year and four-year institutions review the length of their academic programs and require strong justification for any programs requiring in excess of 60 or 120 credit hours. Although shortening the time to graduation, the effect of this requirement was also to further limit the number of semester hours required in the general education core at most institutions—the primary courses that community college students expect to transfer into a four-year degree. And finally, the report recommended that “all four-year institutions should implement the transfer policy and continue to develop cooperative arrangements with community colleges to ease the difficulties of transfer” (Miller, 1993, p. 2).
Again in 1995, institutions were encouraged to implement the State Policy on Transfer through a recommendation in another SCHEV report to the Governor and General Assembly. In response to Senate Joint Resolution 182, the Council studied the transfer of academic credits with particular focus on encouraging minority transfers from two-year to four-year institutions (Council Notes, January 11, 1995). Noting “that transfer is a significant issue for the Commonwealth,” the Council approved six recommendations related to: (a) monitoring implementation of the state policy, (b) encouraging articulation agreements between two- and four-year institutions, (c) ensuring dissemination of accurate transfer information, (d) building more transfer courses into community college applied degree programs, and (e) developing an on-line data base for monitoring transfer policies and practices (Council Notes, January 11, 1995).

Echoing concerns about time-to-degree and unnecessary duplication of courses and programs, the Virginia Business Higher Education Council, in a 1997 report, highlighted the importance of transfer in meeting the challenges of preparing a workforce for the future. The Business Council admonished higher education to “work toward a seamless alignment of undergraduate requirements, transfer requirements, and degree requirements among all of [Virginia’s] public institutions (Business Council, 1997, 14).

The Council of Higher Education for Virginia in the 1999 Virginia Plan focused on issues related to access and “minimiz[ing] institutional barriers that delay a student’s progress toward a degree” (p. 45). Once again, transfer was included as important to the public’s investment in higher education.

Finally, ongoing attention must be given to the State Policy on Transfer to keep pace with curricular changes on the campuses in order to maintain the...
Commonwealth’s commitment to provide for students an easy and orderly process of transfer, especially from two-year to four-year institutions (SCHEV, 1999, p. 45).

Historically, the state’s interest in transfer has been to maintain the status quo in terms of academic elitism, protecting institutional autonomy, avoiding duplication of programs and courses, and providing access to higher education while managing effectively the public’s resources. But what should the goals and objectives of state transfer policy be? Increasing the number of baccalaureate degree graduates? Providing greater access to baccalaureate degree programs? Improving the efficient use of resources? Or ensuring the quality of education outcomes? What does having a state policy on transfer mean to the institutions charged with policy implementation? How does the meaning of the policy affect the way it is implemented on the college campuses?

As noted earlier, studies of states’ efforts to address transfer issues through public policy have contributed little to an understanding of how state mandates work at the institutional level to ensure transfer opportunities for community college students (Bender, 1990; Knoell, 1990). A useful study of state transfer policies must do more than describe policy. It must also interpret policy in context. A search of the literature created a context by describing the historical development of community colleges, how SREB states have responded to transfer and articulation issues, and the history of transfer in Virginia.

The literature suggests, however, that policy makers in higher education have little knowledge of what works from a state policy perspective. Most studies have discussed transfer rates, transfer student characteristics and performance, or described...
good institutional practices. What is lacking in the literature is evidence that transfer policies are implemented as intended or that they have produced intended results. The purpose of this study of Virginia's transfer policy was to contribute to an understanding of the complexity of implementing state-level policies at the institutional level and to a discussion of transfer and articulation as important public policy issues.
A growing number of states are implementing transfer and articulation policies to bridge the gaps between various segments of education and to ensure access and efficiency in public colleges and universities (Bender, 1990; Mercer, 1992; Schmidt, 1997). States have developed a number of ways to address transfer issues, but the literature on transfer contains little evidence that these policies are effective in achieving their objectives (Bender, 1990). Under continued threats of loss of autonomy and control over admissions and the curriculum, higher education professionals must be prepared to argue the case for less intrusive policies that protect the culture and traditional values of the institution, yet meet public policy goals (Berdahl & McConnell, 1994).

Good policy-making requires good information, but conventional quantitative approaches to policy analysis have shed little light on the effects of policy at the institutional level (Greer, 1986; Knoell, 1990; McLaughlin, 1991; Trow, 1997). To understand the effects of state transfer policies, research must seek to understand how state policies are interpreted and implemented on the college campus (Seidman, 1991).

A Statement of Bias

When Virginia's State Policy on Transfer was adopted in 1991, the task of monitoring its implementation was designated to the State Committee on Transfer. The statewide committee was composed of representatives from two- and four-year public and private institutions, the Department of Education, and staff from the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV) and the Virginia Community College System.
(VCCS). As the VCCS staff member to the State Committee, I have witnessed over the past five years the progress colleges have made in bringing their institutions into compliance with the requirements of the policy, and the issue of the policy's effect on transfer practices has been raised again and again at our meetings. Although written documents have provided evidence of compliance with most components of the policy, anecdotal evidence from the colleges suggest that students are not always benefiting from the policy as intended.

Based on seven years of experience at a VCCS campus prior to my move to a staff position in the VCCS central office, I understand well the discrepancies between policy and practice. As a counselor at one of the largest urban campuses in the VCCS, I advised students whose primary goal was to transfer to four-year colleges and universities. I experienced first-hand students' frustrations in trying to understand the inconsistencies in admissions policies and the acceptance of transfer credits among the state's four-year institutions, and witnessed the varying levels of competency and interest demonstrated by advisors and counselors charged with transfer advising. My experience at the community college also included six years as coordinator of the college's outcomes assessment activities. In that role, I collected and analyzed data on the success of students who transferred from the community college to public four-year institutions in the state, and felt the frustration of not having access to most transfer data.

When I moved to my current position in the central office of the VCCS, I gained a new perspective on the state's transfer policy as I became immersed in monitoring the policy implementation process. Clearly, from a statewide perspective, various
components of the policy have never been fully implemented, and the effects of the policy have never been adequately assessed.

Approaches to a Study of the State Transfer Policy

Attempts to study public policy in education have focused on issues of organization and governance or on the process of policy and decision-making in higher education (Coombs, n.d.). Theories such as Lindblom’s (1959) incrementalism, Cohen, March and Owens’ (1972) garbage can model, and Wirt and Kirst’s use of Easton’s (1965) systems analysis model are useful as descriptive models of policy-making processes. They are not particularly useful tools, however, for evaluating the effectiveness of the outcomes or products of the policy-making process—the policies themselves.

Policy analysis is the tool used by politicians to formulate policy and examine the outcomes of policy alternatives. Policy analysis can be a useful evaluative tool in describing various actions and their consequences and making value judgments about the efficiency and fairness of the policy outcomes (Bardach, 1996). Policy analysts identify problems and needs, establish priorities, identify alternatives and their possible outcomes, and recommend policy that accomplishes the goals within the constraints of the resources available (Bardach, 1996; Leslie & Brown, 1999).

Policy analysis thus can be used to examine both process and product, but it is different from policy research and evaluation in a number of significant ways. Analysis is used for the purpose of gaining political leverage rather than for conducting objective investigations to advance knowledge of a phenomenon (Bardach, 1996). Starting with what they know, and knowing what they want, policy analysts attempt to identify the
"policy levers" (variables) that can be changed (manipulated) to effect desired outcomes (immediate results) (Dye, 1987; Leslie & Brown, 1999). Policy analysis considers the costs and benefits of policy, and the ethics of what is possible and doable for the public good, but conventional approaches seldom establish effects of policy in the context of institutional practices.

Coombs (n.d.) identified several practical reasons for requiring special methodological tools for educational policy research: (a) the complexity, high visibility and labor intensity of educational processes, and (b) the dispersion of authority and ambiguity about goals in the educational enterprise. Leslie and Brown (1999) also suggested that education policy research seems to impose a different level of scrutiny. They proposed a "logic of inquiry" based on Dillon (1984) that "begins with a retrospective examination of experience and culminates with an effort to scan accepted theory to find rationales for action" (p. 16). In a paper delivered at the April 1999 meeting of the American Educational Research Association (AERA), they proposed a sequence of questions for policy inquiry that builds on "a descriptive and historical foundation, comparative and evaluative assessment, and correlation and multivariate testing" (p. 22). Although the usefulness of the sequence is not limited to quantitative research designs, Leslie and Brown's heuristic is a cumulative meta-analytical approach to policy inquiry. The authors ignore, however, the critical issues of values that underlie policy choices.

Lincoln (1990) describes one qualitative approach to an education policy study as fourth generation of education evaluation. According to Lincoln, evaluation has moved through four generations, each with a different focus—from a technical (highly
quantitative) generation, through a descriptive generation, a generation of evaluator as judge, and finally, to a generation of negotiation in which the evaluator serves as a mediator between stakeholders' interests. The value of this fourth generation qualitative approach is that it acknowledges the political context of education policy-making and the value of various stakeholders' interests and concerns in the evaluation process.

The focus of this study was not policy-making, policy analysis, or policy evaluation, but rather policy implementation. A more useful conceptual framework for examining policy implementation at the institutional level is policy inquiry based on Guba's (1984) categories of policy definitions. Guba argued convincingly in an article on the outcomes of policy analysis that "varying interpretations of the word policy greatly affect how and where particular policies are created and implemented and ultimately, whether their results are as intended" (p. 63). Based on Guba's framework, the way colleges interpret the state policy will determine the policy questions they ask and the strategies they use to answer them. A summary of Guba's policy types and definitions is outlined in Figure 1.

Using a Collective Case Study Approach to Policy Inquiry

"The meaning people make of their experiences affects the way they carry out that experience" (Seidman, 1991, p. 4). To better understand the meaning of policy, policy research should go beyond a description of policy components and quantifiable outcomes to examine policy as it is implemented in a specific context relative to a conceptual or theoretical framework (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Yanow, 1996). The goal of this study was to describe and interpret various policy meanings by overlaying Guba's (1984) conceptual framework on data gathered in a number of case studies and combine

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them in a collective case study of transfer policy implementation. Guba's categories of policy definitions helped to focus the collection of data, identify key factors and their relationships, and guide the data analysis (Keeves & Sowden, 1997). The possibility of emerging definitions not included in Guba’s framework was also explored.

No evidence was found in the literature search that this approach has been used to study the effects of state transfer policies. A plethora of studies based on quantitative data such as transfer rates and transfer student success have contributed little to an understanding of the effects of state transfer policies at the institution level. Few conventional quasi-experimental designs have attempted to isolate the effects of policy on transfer behavior (Cohen, 1995), and the number of institutional and student variables that have to be controlled in these types of studies make it difficult to isolate the policy’s effects (Seidman, 1991; Stake, 1997; Yin, 1984). This study looked at patterns of meaning, not variables, in the policy definitions that guide transfer activity and responses to the state policy (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Stake, 1995; Sturman, 1997; Yin, 1984).

The goal of this study was to provide insight into how state transfer policy has been understood and implemented at the institutional level. Implementation of Virginia’s State Policy on Transfer on selected college campuses was selected as a “case” of policy implementation—an integrated, “bounded system” (Stake, 1990) of institutional policies, processes, and people that function together to facilitate transfer from the state’s two-year colleges to the four-year institutions. Because each college is important to the functioning of the state policy, a “collective case study” design was used (Stake, 1990). In a study of “how” and “why,” the case study is an appropriate methodology, and a collective case study design is recommended where the purpose is not in-depth studies
but comparisons across sites (Sturman, 1997; Yin, 1984). Multiple case studies combined in a collective case study can be instrumental to a study of statewide policy and the many meanings that the policy can have (Berdahl, 1987; Stake, 1997).

Selection Criteria for the Cases

Table 3 summarizes steps used in data collection and analysis for this study. The selection of colleges for the case studies did not depend on a criterion of representation, but on the criterion to maximize what could be learned about the many meanings that the policy could have (Stake, 1995).

One of the assumptions made in this study was that as primary feeders of transfer students to four-year institutions, community colleges should serve as the primary context for interpreting the state transfer policy. In addition, one of the propositions of the study was that different policy definitions would produce different outcomes in terms of transfer activity. An important factor, then, in selecting colleges for the mini-studies was identifying community colleges where there was an expectation of contrasting or similar policy meanings based on levels of transfer activity (Keeves & Sowden, 1997).

Community colleges were selected for this study using tables of data produced in 1998 by the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV) for the State Committee on Transfer. The tables provided five years of numeric data on transfer activity between VCCS colleges and public and private four-year institutions in Virginia. Aggregate data were listed by institution and included student variables of credit hours earned, academic program type, and race. The data tracked cohorts of students who enrolled at a community college in the fall semester of years 1993-94, 1994-95, 1995-96, 1996-97 or 1997-98 and enrolled in a Virginia four-year college or university in
### Table 3: Summary of Study Methodology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Step 1</td>
<td>Analyzed VCCS data on transfer activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 2</td>
<td>Selected cases of community colleges to represent range of transfer activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Highest level of activity (community college C)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Lowest level of activity (community college B)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• 5-year decline in activity (community college A)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Typical level of transfer activity (community college E)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Above average transfer activity in occupational/technical degree programs (community college D)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 3</td>
<td>Selected interviewees based on recommendations from community college deans; contacted interviewees by telephone and followed up with a consent letter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 4</td>
<td>Conducted site visits to VCCS colleges to gather web page and print documents and conduct (taped) interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 5</td>
<td>Based on VCCS interviews, identified public four-year colleges to which most two-year college students transferred</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 6</td>
<td>Identified Chief Transfer Officer or admissions director or person with primary responsibility for evaluating transfer credit at four-year institutions; contacted interviewees by telephone and followed up with a consent letter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 7</td>
<td>Conducted site visits to gather web page and print documents and conduct (taped) interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 8</td>
<td>Transcribed interview tapes and analyzed data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• For each respondent—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Identified major points in responses to each interview question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Examined responses for evidence of Guba’s policy types</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Summarized over-arching themes, issues, concerns of respondent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• For each institution—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Compared results of individual interviews to identify common themes, issues, and concerns of the institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Compared results of individual responses for evidence of common policy types or definitions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3: Summary of Study Methodology (continued)

- Across cases—
  - Compared results of matched two- and four-year institutions to identify common themes related to transfer
  - Identified over-arching themes across all cases
  - Compared policy definitions across cases

Step 9

Analyzed documents for each institution

Examined documents for content related to the state policy and evidence of Guba’s policy types and definitions

Compared results of document analysis and interview transcript analysis for consistencies and inconsistencies in themes and evidence of policy types and definitions
subsequent years through 1997-98. (Data were not available for 1998-99.) Although the population included all students enrolled in credit courses at a VCCS college for each of these fall semesters, separate tables also were provided that tracked graduates only.

These data were selected for two reasons. The first is that SCHEV's database could not provide this type of information before 1992. Prior to 1992, SCHEV collected only aggregate data from colleges and universities, which did not include individual student data. Second, the state's transfer policy was not approved until December 1991, and data were needed that would reflect trends or possible effects of the state policy on transfer activity.

Most definitions of transfer rates used in national studies are based on first-time enrolled students who transfer from a community college after completing a minimum of twelve transferable credits (Bender, 1990; Cohen, 1995; Knoell, 1990). These figures misrepresent the amount of transfer activity between two-year and four-year institutions when returning, non-degree seeking, and occupational-technical students are a significant part of Virginia's transfer population. Furthermore, these figures do not take into account student's intent to transfer. For the purposes of this study, then, transfer activity was defined as the percentage of graduates in the VCCS cohorts who enrolled at four-year institutions in subsequent years through 1997-98. The assumption was made that students who graduated from a university-parallel degree program were most likely to transfer, but because of the number of articulated technical programs, graduates of applied degree programs also were tracked.

These cohorts of graduates were selected from the population because only graduates of transfer degree programs (and students who complete thirty-five hours of a
general education core) are covered under the state policy; however, articulation of applied degree programs is encouraged. Transfer enrollments were tracked separately for public and private four-year institutions since only public institutions are subject to the state policy, but many private institutions voluntarily have complied with the spirit of the policy.

Results of the quantitative data analysis were used to select community colleges as case studies. Initially, the intent was to select the outliers—one college that demonstrated the strongest transfer activity and one that demonstrated the least amount of transfer activity among the VCCS colleges for the years 1993-94 to 1997-98. A case of typical transfer activity was also selected, but other characteristics of interest were suggested by the data as well—a college that showed a decrease in transfer activity and one that showed higher transfer activity than might be expected from graduates of applied degree programs—programs not designed to transfer. Thus, a total of five community colleges were selected for the collective case study. The colleges selected were not intended to be a representative sample for the purposes of generalizing results. Rather, the cases captured a range of transfer activity in the state with the expectation that colleges would demonstrate contrasting and similar policy definitions related to varying rates of transfer activity. The primary focus of the study was understanding how each institution defined and implemented the policy. A secondary focus was across-case comparisons.

The way four-year institutions understand and implement the transfer policy also is key to understanding the institutional effects of the state policy. Four four-year colleges were identified for the study using a snowball technique (Glesne & Peshkin,
1992)—making a contact with one community college and following recommendations. Thus, once the data gathering was completed for each of the community colleges, the data were examined to identify references to particularly strong or weak relationships with four-year institutions. An attempt was made to identify four-year colleges that appeared to demonstrate varying levels of receptivity to admitting community college students. Based on the strength of their relationship with one of the community college cases, four four-year institutions were selected, and the processes of data collection and analysis were repeated for each of the four-year colleges and universities.

Sources of Data

In designing this study, the intent was to interpret the various meanings that policy could have in order to make assertions about the way colleges have defined and implemented the state transfer policy (Stake, 1995). According to Stake, “the interview is the main road to multiple realities” (Stake, 1995, p. 64) and the interview was selected as the primary source of data for this study.

Interviews are an appropriate method of data collection when there is interest not only in etic (researcher’s) issues, but also in allowing emic (respondents’) issues to emerge, or when a rich description, rather than a simple, quantifiable survey response, is desired (Stake, 1995). Interviews provide an opportunity to follow-up and explore responses in greater depth for clarity and understanding. Focused interviews have the potential of providing information not only about what the researcher wants to know, but also about what the respondent wants the researcher to know about the issues.

“Understanding a case is greatly facilitated by finding an informant...someone who knows a lot about the case and is willing to chat (Stake, 1995, p. 67). The State
Policy on Transfer stipulates that each college designates one individual as the chief source of transfer information for the institution. At the community colleges, an attempt was made to interview the chief transfer officer (CTO) and the dean of the college, along with a faculty advisor or counselor identified by the dean or the CTO as knowledgeable about the transfer function at the college. At least three individuals were interviewed at each of the community colleges. In the case of one community college, the initial contact arranged a focus group interview with the other respondents, so a follow-up interview was conducted with the CTO because of the potential of "group think" results from the group interview to give an inaccurate picture of transfer at the institution.

At the four-year institutions, although the CTO is likely to be the director of admissions or a staff member with primary responsibility for transfer admissions, an administrator identified as being responsible for making decisions about the transferability of credits was interviewed. At one four-year institution, a group of transfer advisors and associate deans was interviewed. Transfer decisions at that institution are made at the individual college and department levels rather than at the university level, and the group interview was more likely to capture the institution's perspectives on the state policy. The total number of interviews planned was sufficient to get a picture of how the state transfer policy is interpreted and implemented across the state. In total, 29 informants were interviewed for the study. Table 4 summarizes the selection of respondents for the interviews.

In addition to interviews, information was gathered through an examination of electronic and print-based catalogs and transfer guides. College documents were examined for references to the state transfer policy and references to transfer in the
Table 4: Selection of Respondents for College Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution and Method of Selection</th>
<th>Respondent by Role</th>
<th>Length of Interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community College A</td>
<td>Dean of Instruction &amp; Student Services</td>
<td>1.5 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(initial contact with dean who identified other respondents)</td>
<td>Faculty advisor (Communications)</td>
<td>1.0 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Director of Admissions &amp; Records (and Chief Transfer Officer)</td>
<td>1.0 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coordinator for the Transfer Center</td>
<td>1.0 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four-year Institution A</td>
<td>Director of Academic Advising (also former Associate Director of Admissions and Co-chair of the State Committee on Transfer)</td>
<td>2.0 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(identified the Chief Transfer Officer)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community College B</td>
<td>Dean of Instruction &amp; Student Services (also Chief Transfer Officer)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(initial contact with the dean who identified other respondents and brought them together in a focus group interview)</td>
<td>Enrollment Services Specialist</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Academic Division Chair</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coordinator for Trio Programs (also formerly the Chief Transfer Officer)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(separate follow-up interview)</td>
<td>Coordinator for Trio Programs</td>
<td>2.25 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(No primary public four-year institution identified)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community College C</td>
<td>Transfer Coordinator (also Chief Transfer Officer)</td>
<td>1.0 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(initial contact with Academic director who identified other respondents)</td>
<td>Director of Academic Programs</td>
<td>1.0 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Faculty Advisor (Liberal Arts) (also Co-chair of State Committee on Transfer)</td>
<td>1.5 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institution and Method of Selection</td>
<td>Respondent by Role</td>
<td>Length of Interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
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<td>---------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four-year Institution C</td>
<td>Associate Dean for College of Humanities, Arts, &amp; Sciences (also Co-chair of State Committee on Transfer)</td>
<td>1.0 hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(identified Chief Transfer Officer)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community College D</td>
<td>Academic Division Chair</td>
<td>1.5 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(initial contact with dean who identified other respondents)</td>
<td>Director of Student Services (also member of State Committee on Transfer)</td>
<td>2.0 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coordinator for Academic Assessment</td>
<td>1.0 hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four-year Institution D</td>
<td>Assist. to the Dean (Arch &amp; Urban Studies)</td>
<td>2.5 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(initial contact with member of State Committee who is associate dean and who brought together other respondents for a focus group interview)</td>
<td>Assoc. Dean (Agric. &amp; Life Sciences)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vice Provost Academic Affairs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Counselor (Natural Resources)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Assoc. Dean (Human Resources &amp; Educ.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Assoc. Dean (Business)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Faculty Advisor (Human Resources &amp; Educ.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coord. Academic Support (Engineering)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Faculty Advisor (Agric. &amp; Life Sciences)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community College E</td>
<td>Dean of Instruction &amp; Student Services</td>
<td>1.0 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(initial contact with dean who identified other respondents)</td>
<td>Coordinator of Student Services (also member of State Committee on Transfer)</td>
<td>1.5 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Faculty Advisor (Mathematics)</td>
<td>1.0 hour</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4: Selection of Respondents for College Interviews
(continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution and Method of Selection</th>
<th>Respondent by Role</th>
<th>Length of Interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Four-year College E</td>
<td>Director of Admissions</td>
<td>3.0 hours</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(identified former Chief Transfer Officer and member of State Committee on Transfer)
college's mission statement and program information. Although relevant materials were requested from the informants, the primary source of documents was the institution's Web site. The colleges' catalogs, transfer guides, and mission statements were examined (a) to gain an understanding of the background and rationale for the way state-level and campus policies are implemented on the campuses, (b) to determine whether or not the documents corroborate the information gained through the interviews, and (c) to identify various ways the transfer policy is reflected at the campus.

Data Collection

Data were gathered for each of the mini-cases in a one-day visit to the college campus between September 1999 and February 2000. A letter of informed consent is included as Appendix B. Unless otherwise noted in Table 4, arrangements were made directly with the respondents to conduct the interviews on campus at a location that was comfortable and convenient for the respondents, and at a time that did not conflict with scheduled meetings, classes, or office hours. Respondents were provided with a description of the study and a copy of the interview guide prior to the interview. Perhaps because of my role in the VCCS, respondents indicated a willingness to talk about transfer and expressed their desire to help improve transfer for community college students. At both of the focus group interviews, refreshments were provided by the respondents, creating a welcoming atmosphere for the discussions.

The interview guide is included in Appendix C. Questions were relatively open-ended to encourage interviewees to inform rather than to respond to a forced choice question format (Stake, 1995). Based on the limited number of questions in the guide, interviews were expected to be short—no longer than 60 to 90 minutes, and were focused
to get to an understanding of the state policy's meaning for the college faculty and staff (Stake, 1995). The same research questions were asked in each interview to permit cross-case comparisons and yet focus on the institution's understandings of the policy (Keeves & Sowden, 1997). Results of individual interviews at each institution were checked against one another to determine if they were internally consistent and representative of campus policies and practices.

The primary criterion used to develop the interview questions was the information needed to understand policy implementation at the campus level. A basic assumption of the interview research was "that the meaning people make of their experience affects the way they carry out that experience" (Seidman, 1991, p. 4). In other words, the meaning that respondents ascribe to the state policy affects the way the policy is implemented. Questions were developed in a logical sequence to arrive at the meaning of the policy for the respondents.

The first question was focused on the respondents' roles related to transfer and the reasons why they were identified as someone knowledgeable about transfer. The next question asked respondents to comment on the significance of transfer to their work and to the missions of their institutions. Respondents were then asked to describe the steps they follow when they work with students who are interested in transferring and what they think is important for transfer students to know. Included also was a question about the resources available to students who want to transfer. Next, respondents were asked how and what they know about students' experiences with transfer. The cumulative effect of this sequence was to provide a context for how the respondent defined the policy. Finally, respondents were asked to discuss their experience with the policy and to
give reasons for their assessment of the policy's effectiveness. How do they view the policy? How has it been implemented and with what effects?

With permission from the respondents, the interviews were tape recorded and transcribed for analysis. The interview questions were designed to elicit information that could be used to answer the following research questions posed earlier on the basis of the literature search:

1. What are faculty and staff understandings of the meaning of the State Policy on Transfer?
2. How do their understandings of the state policy fit with the values and practices of their institutions? How important is the transfer function to the mission of the college?
3. How is the state policy implemented at the campus level? Is it adapted to meet the institution’s needs, or is the policy largely ignored? How are the policy meanings communicated?
4. How do faculty and staff understandings of the policy contribute to variations in transfer outcomes, practices, and perceptions of the policy’s effectiveness?
5. Is the policy ambiguous? Does it allow colleges to define the policy through the process of implementation?

Data Analysis

Quantitative data analysis

The first step in data analysis was to derive descriptive statistics from the transfer data supplied by SCHEV for the years 1993-1998. The transfer policy is directed at (a) students who graduate from a transfer associate degree program, and (b) non-degree
seeking students who complete a minimum of 35 credits in traditional transfer courses. These groups are therefore more likely to be affected by the state policy and its implementation. Although the transfer policy also addresses the need to monitor students by race to determine whether or not transfer activity is related to race and program, race was not considered for the purposes of this study. Minimum grade point average is not addressed by the policy.

Transfer activity rates were computed manually from the tables of data for transfer degree and applied degree graduates in each cohort for each of the community colleges. Percentages were based on the number of students who subsequently enrolled at a four-year institution divided by the number of students in the cohort. Non-degree students who completed more than thirty-five credits at the community college were considered, but because credits were cumulative over the years and that effect could not be factored out, these data were set aside to focus on degree graduates.

On the basis of these descriptive statistics, colleges were selected to include a broad range of transfer activity in the study. The outliers and typical transfer rates were identified, as well as trends in transfer activity between 1992 and 1998. Five community colleges were selected as case studies to represent the outliers and typical transfer activity. Although not intended as a criterion for selection, the community colleges selected turned out to represent the major geographical regions of the state. Also unintentionally, one large multi-campus college, one medium sized college, and three smaller community colleges ended up in the sample.
Analysis of documents and interview transcripts

Each case was treated separately for the initial analysis of the data. In the final analysis, the data were grouped as a collective case study in which site comparisons were made (Keeves & Sowden, 1997).

College documents such as catalogs and transfer guides, brochures and pamphlets were secured from respondents, and copies were made from the Web site as needed of materials relevant to institutional transfer policies and the state policy. The primary criterion for selecting an information source was its usefulness in understanding the importance of transfer to the institution’s mission and the way the state policy has been implemented or ignored at the campus level. In all cases, the colleges’ electronic catalogs and transfer guides, as well as the colleges’ mission statements, were used for this purpose.

The document review focused on whether or not the State Policy on Transfer was referenced in the materials, either by direct quotations from the policy or by interpretations of the policy in statements such as “The State Policy on Transfer dictates that…” The Web sites were examined for either a copy of the state policy or a direct link to the state policy located on the home page of either the VCCS or SCHEV. College statements about what students could expect in transferring to a four-year institution were reviewed for consistencies and contradictions with the state policy and with interview results. Key words were identified to interpret the policy’s meaning relative to Guba’s policy types:

1. goals, rules, guidelines, strategies (policy-in-intention)
2. expectations, sanctioned behavior, effects (policy-in-action)
3. encounters (policy-in-experience).

Interview tapes were transcribed so that the text could be analyzed (Yin, 1984). As recommended by Keeves and Sowden (1997), only major thoughts and the most important quotes in the lengthy interviews were transcribed from portions of the interviews where respondents strayed from the central focus of the interview.

This study did not use a “grounded theory” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) design. Rather, the strategy used to process the data was to overlay Guba’s (1984) conceptual framework rather than allow a theory to emerge from the data itself. The intent was not to force categories, but to examine the fit and possibly give credence to, or to modify, Guba’s framework as a helpful tool for examining the state transfer policy (Seidman, 1991). Policy definitions were inferred from the text of respondents’ interviews, while keeping open the possibility for new categories to be developed through the process of data collection and analysis. Interviewees were not asked directly to define the state policy in terms of Guba’s types and definitions.

Yin (1984) made a distinction between five levels of questions that should be asked in analyzing a multiple-case study and the logic of this sequence was used to analyze the data in this study. Level one analysis looked at those questions asked of specific interviewees. Level two were those that were asked of the individual case, comparing interviewees’ responses for internal consistency and contradictions. Level three examined questions across all cases to identify themes or issues for each case or institution, and level four questions overarched the entire study, including any studies cited in the literature review. Finally, level five questions went beyond the scope of the study to include recommendations for future research. Because similar data were not
available from the limited number of relevant studies identified through the literature review, the fourth level of analysis made in this study could not include similar studies in the review. However, results that confirmed or contradicted findings cited in the literature review were examined. Recommendations for future research are addressed in the concluding chapter of this report.

The first step in analyzing the documents and the interview transcripts was to segment the text into meaningful units—the smallest phrase or point that could stand on its own, and record them on index cards for sorting (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Each card was coded to identify the source of the text segment—interviewee, institution, and document (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Keeves & Sowden, 1997; Seidman, 1991). A second code or keyword was used to capture the major thought or point of the phrase (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Keeves & Sowden, 1997;).

The next step of the analysis was to organize the data into categories by keywords and search for patterns and connections across the categories to minimize content overlap and ensure that categories were discrete (Keeves & Sowden, 1997). The categories then were compared to Guba's policy definitions and a code was assigned to all cards in a category as an identifier for one of Guba's policy meanings. Outliers were coded into a separate category for further analysis. Results from all interviewees in each case were compared to determine whether or not a pattern of shared meaning was evident for the institution. This analysis provided information on what informants thought would or should happen as a result of the policy, what the college did to ensure those outcomes, or what the respondent perceived to be the actual results or experience of policy implementation.
Once the analysis was completed for each of the community colleges, the processes of data collection and analysis were repeated for each of the four-year institutions. Results from all of the cases were then compared to determine whether or not patterns of shared policy meanings emerged. Policy meanings were examined in the context of quantitative data on transfer activity to discover whether or not there appeared to be any relationship between policy definitions and transfer activity.

Analysis relied heavily on direct interpretations and somewhat less on coded data as the analysis progressed because of the difficulty in identifying discrete categories. Thus, both “categorical aggregation” and “direct interpretation” were used as analytic strategies (Stake, 1995, p. 77).

Limitations

One of the criticisms of education research is that it has relatively little influence on the practice of educators and policy makers (Husen, 1997). The problem may be in defining what we mean by valid and reliable research, or in the difficulty of translating research into practice (Nisbet, 1997). Similarly, some education policies may have little influence on education practice, perhaps because of the different interpretations that drive policy implementation (Yanow, 1990).

The purpose of this research study was to describe how the state transfer policy in Virginia has been implemented by examining existing numeric data, interview transcripts, and written documents concerning transfer in the context of Guba’s (1984) conceptual framework for policy analysis. Policy definitions, inferred from documents and interviews, were compared to policy outcomes, operationally defined as transfer activity. The questions that were explored were whether or not there is a relationship
between policy definitions and outcomes, and whether or not different policy definitions produce different outcomes.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) argued a strong case for the strength of "naturalistic inquiry" and case study methodology for understanding meanings of social phenomena and for providing a perspective from those who practice it. Stake (1997) examined case study research as a rigorous research method, and Gall, Borg, and Gall (1996) noted that case study research is "the most widely used approach to qualitative inquiry in education" (p. 541). But the limitations of this proposed research methodology for studying education policy should be addressed. As Eisner pointed out, critics have associated numerous problems with methods in qualitative research, including issues of relativism, subjectivism, generalizability, validity, reliability, and standards for assessing the quality of the research.

One issue or potential limitation of case study research is its "truth value" or credibility—the level of confidence that can be put in the findings when judgements must be made (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For example, more data were collected in this study than could possibly be analyzed, so a great deal of data were set aside to focus on the most relevant. And although several hours were spent on community college campuses conducting interviews, spending only a brief period of time at the four-year college, and in most cases depending on a single interview, could have led to distortions or misinformation. The interviews conducted at the community colleges were sufficient to begin hearing the same themes emerge. The interviews conducted at the four-year institutions, however, were intended to confirm or contradict or to offer new insights into
the data collected at the two-year colleges. Interviewing a knowledgeable respondent seemed sufficient when the purpose was not an in-depth case study.

Certainly, examining documents and analyzing interview transcripts required making judgments about the meanings implicit in those data and interpreting them in the context of Guba's policy definitions. Understanding relationships, rather than providing evidence of correlation, is at the heart of case study research. My interest in this study was not on counting occurrences of a given phenomenon but in recognizing themes and the meanings the various players ascribed to the state transfer policy. How reliable are my interpretations as the researcher? One assurance of the integrity of this research is based on my experience working with the colleges since the inception of the state policy—experience that contributed to my ability to understand the vocabulary and the issues that respondents and the documents were communicating.

That expertise, however, could potentially raise ethical questions concerning my role as a researcher in this study. Not only because I was an outsider at the institution, but also because of my responsibilities in the central office of the VCCS, some respondents may have been reluctant to discuss honestly the transfer policies and practices at their institutions. Trust was an important factor even though the focus of the study was not highly sensitive in terms of putting the respondent or the institution at risk. Interviewees were assured both verbally and in writing that there were no hidden agendas to identify institutions out of compliance with the policy, and that nothing collected in the study could or would be used against them or the college. Assurances were made of anonymity in the final report of findings.
To guard against the element of researcher bias, the respondents’ own words were used in reporting findings, and themes were allowed to emerge from the data. Results of transfer studies from the literature were compared to the data being gathered to confirm or clarify my understandings of what was being communicated. The themes that emerged from the study were also compared with results from a survey conducted in 1998 of the Chief Transfer Officers to provide some evidence of the study’s dependability or replicability.

Expertise in the subject matter contributed to confidence in my ability to describe accurately a picture of transfer policy implementation in Virginia, but a technique known as triangulation also was used to compare the evidence (Denzin, 1997; Stake, 1995). Multiple sources of data as well as multiple perspectives were explored to enhance credibility. Although no standards were applied to the data to evaluate levels of understanding or compliance with the policy, multiple understandings of what the policy meant could suggest that perceptions of the policy’s effectiveness were related to varying policy definitions. By exploring a number of data sources, greater confidence could be placed in the results as the data converged.

For example, a wide range of transfer activity, student body characteristics, geographical locations, and institutional size were represented in the cases. Interviews from each of the community colleges also reflected the varying perspectives of campus deans, administrators, faculty, and counselors. Enough interviews were planned and conducted to account for a number of views, but no additional interviews were needed when the same issues began to emerge. Thus, data source triangulation was used to
confirm that similar results could be found under a variety of circumstances and that the assertions made were an accurate representation of the case (Stake, 1995).

Another method used to triangulate results was to examine the data from the theoretical perspective of Guba's policy definitions. The application of that framework was intended to offer another way to describe multiple policy meanings and to see how they compared.

Finally, methodological triangulation was used to increase confidence by combining focus group interviews, individual interviews, and a review of college documents (Stake, 1995). Quantified, descriptive data on enrollments and transfer activity also were used to describe varying levels of transfer activity at the colleges. Web-based catalogs, mission statements, and transfer guides and publications were examined. An important characteristic of all these documents was that they were readily available to all of the respondents to examine and interpret for themselves.

To strengthen confidence in the findings, member checking could have been used to ask respondents to review the summaries for accuracy in reflecting their institutions. Although this was done selectively and informally, providing the opportunity for formal feedback could only have strengthened the study if interviewees had chosen to respond.

Generalizability was not an intended outcome of this study, although the study sought to show that interpretations of the transfer policy affect both the way policy is implemented and the policy outcomes. The study does provide, however, a rich context for understanding the various meanings that a policy can take on.

Finally, an audit trail of the data was documented should other researchers want to conduct their own analysis using these data (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). All raw data—
descriptive statistics, interview tapes and transcripts, Web documents and other notes relevant to the data collection and analysis processes have been retained to in the interest of establishing confirmability (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

One final note should be made concerning the quantitative data used to select colleges for the study. As a matter of convenience, existing data were used for the quantitative analysis of transfer activity, so no attempt was made to control how the data were extracted from the database or compiled. Duplicate enrollments were possible if students enrolled in more than one institution concurrently. And because the SCHEV database was initiated in 1992, students in the fall cohorts after 1993-94 had additional years to accumulate an excess of thirty-five credits. In other words, the data captured students at a particular point in time. A normal distribution of student characteristics was assumed because the population included all students enrolled in credit courses, but such things as changes in a student’s choice of academic program were not considered (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996).
CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS OF RESULTS FOR PAIRED COMMUNITY COLLEGES AND FOUR-YEAR INSTITUTIONS

The focus of this study was on understanding how Virginia's State Policy on Transfer is understood by those who have to implement it, how those understandings affect the way the policy is implemented, and what, if any, are the obstacles to policy implementation. Policy implementation has been described as an interactive process of negotiations over the meaning of policy, and shared policy definitions have been offered as the link between policy-making and policy-implementation.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a narrative description of policy implementation at each of the five community colleges selected for the study and of the four-year institutions to which most of the two-year colleges' students transfer. The format is the same for each case study. Descriptive detail, quotations, and interpretive comments are used to address in sequential order responses to each of the questions in the interview guide. Statistical data are used to define the community college in terms of size, geographic location, and transfer activity, followed by a discussion of the document analysis and references made to transfer and the state policy in the colleges' Web-based mission statements, catalogs, and transfer guides.

Using respondents' own words, each narrative discusses (a) the importance of transfer to the mission of the institution, (b) what respondents believe transfer students need to know, (c) the resources available to transfer students, (d) students' reported experiences with transfer, and (e) respondents' assessments of the effectiveness of the
state transfer policy. Each community college case is followed by a similar narrative description of the four-year institution to which most of that community college’s students transfer.

The final section of this chapter provides a brief summary of the components of Virginia’s state transfer policy and a summary of how each of the community colleges and its related four-year institution have defined and implemented the policy. The paired institutions are compared to identify common or divergent themes that emerge from the data. Tables 6 and 7 in Chapter 5 summarize the major themes in across-case analysis of the results from all of the colleges.

Virginia Community College A

Selected as a case of declining transfer activity in the VCCS, community college A is a comprehensive two-year college located in a heavily populated area in the eastern peninsula region of the state. The campus is easily accessible off a major east-west interstate highway. Students also have access to several four-year public and private institutions within commuting distance from the college. The college offers both the Associate in Arts and the Associate in Science degrees in a limited number of transfer areas, as well as the Associate in Applied Arts and the Associate in Applied Science in the applied areas. The fall enrollment for 1999-2000 was 7,000 students, 46% of which were classified as transfer degree-seeking students—much higher than the VCCS system-wide average of 33% enrolled in college transfer programs. One in three students was enrolled in an applied program, and one in four students at the college were enrolled full-time.
Although nearly half the students were enrolled in transfer programs, the percentage of transfer degree graduates who enrolled at a Virginia four-year public institution in the fall semester immediately following graduation declined from 58% in 1993-94 to 48% in 1996-97. The percentage enrolling in state private institutions rose approximately one percentage point during the same time period. Data on graduates from occupational-technical (OT) degree programs showed that one in ten enrolled in a four-year institution immediately following graduation. And although applied degree programs are not designed to transfer, over half of all graduates who enrolled in private four-year institutions came out of an occupational-technical program. Approximately one in five of all graduates who transferred to four-year public institutions were graduates with an applied degree.

The college’s mission statement, printed in the online catalog, reflected the importance placed on academics at the institution. In its commitment to being a comprehensive institution, the college stated it provides access to programs “which extend through the associate degree level.” No mention was made in the mission statement of non-degree programs, but certificate and diploma programs were included as educational program goals. “Knowledge and skills required for employment,” and responsiveness “to the educational and skills needs of area businesses, industries, and government agencies” were listed before references to transfer education. But “high academic standards,” a “required core of general education...designed to promote intellectual and cultural awareness,” an “honors program to challenge high achieving students,” and “student development services...to assist students in making well-
considered academic, career, and personal decisions" were identified as important parts of the college's mission "as an institution of higher education."

The college's home page provided no direct links or clear references to transfer, and nowhere in the online catalog information was there a reference to the state transfer policy. References to transfer education were embedded within the departmental websites and assurances were made there about the transferability of courses, without specific references to a transfer policy. For example, the Computer Science department noted that "Computer Science is an AS degree that parallels course work with four-year college requirements. If all courses are selected from the approved transfer elective list, they will automatically transfer to all Virginia institutions." Part-time students were advised not to allow "a substantial time gap between taking core courses at [the college] and those at your transfer institution" because they serve as prerequisites to further study. Students were also advised to complete the general education core first, because "even if you change your major, these general distribution courses will meet transfer requirements."

The Business Administration department advised students to "consult with their 2+2 articulation agreement and/or the college or university to which they plan to transfer for advice" on course selection. Again, no reference was made to the state policy.

Individual interviews were conducted at the college with the dean for instruction and student services, a coordinator in admissions and records, a transfer coordinator, and a faculty member with primary responsibility for advising students who wish to transfer. Staff members interviewed for this study presented a balanced view of the importance of transfer to the college's mission, in the sense that they offered different perspectives on its importance from the point of view of the student, the administration, and the faculty.
Dedicated space for a transfer center provides a conveniently located resource room for students to talk with the transfer coordinator, browse through printed catalogs from a variety of public and private instate and out-of-state four-year institutions, and explore web sites on computer. Acknowledging that she could not give the percentage of community college students who transfer, the coordinator knew “that it’s a large percentage, not more than 50%,” and that transfer “is very important to those students.”

The staff member from admissions and records saw transfer as an important part of the college’s mission, but noted that “it depends on whether you talk about it from a recruitment or a service standpoint.” Based on anecdotal information, her perception was that many students who are looking at college think they ultimately want a bachelor’s degree. So the availability of transfer programs I think helps us with recruitment.” She further explained that because of job opportunities in the area for skilled labor and technicians, the value of the occupational-technical programs may be increasing, but “proximity and small classes…make the transfer programs very attractive.” Although transfer programs were important from a marketing perspective, from a service perspective “with some variability, we’ve always been at about 40-40-20. Forty percent were in declared transfer programs, 40% were in declared OT programs, and 20% non-curricular.” VCCS data for the past two years seem to indicate rising enrollment in transfer programs at the college.

The advisor may influence the selection of a transfer program if the student is “in a career exploration mode.” Counselors were likely to assign a student to a “general ed type curriculum” because “students may know they want a degree, but they don’t know what degree they want” and “they need to be in a curriculum so they can get financial
aid.” According to the admissions counselor, “the transfer programs become dumping grounds for those students”—an administrative convenience rather than a conscious choice by the student.

The dean of the college saw transfer as “one part of our college’s mission,” but because “we have a significant number of students in that area, we give a little more attention to it than we might to an OT area that’s very, very small.” The college is “rebuilding [its] occupational-technical area” and “trying to balance those,” but to some faculty, the focus on transfer is misplaced. “It’s a tough road right now because a lot of the burden is on the transfer areas to cover with a bunch of part-time people so we can start putting some resources back into OT.”

The three administrators pointed to the college’s transfer center as a primary resource for transfer information and the initial contact for transfer counseling and advising. The dean noted the importance of linking career counseling and transfer. “One of the pieces that we’ve got to work at is that we’ve got a career center, a transfer center, and they’re at opposite ends of the campus. It’s not the best way... It’s a long-term plan to get those back in the same general area. But what that means is that the student can go in and get that information.” All of those interviewed expressed the opinion that career information is critical to helping students decide what they want to study and what type of college they want to attend and where.

When a student visits the transfer center, the first thing the coordinator reported that she does “is ask them what curriculum they’re in because there are times students will misunderstand.” Students are not all knowledgeable enough to distinguish between the intent or purposes of a transfer degree and an applied degree, and sometimes students
have slipped through the cracks with thinking they’re in a four-year degree and they’re not.” But selection of a major is not the only critical choice that students have to make early in their college careers. “They need to know a lot about the four-year school and even which ones are available.” The area surrounding the college offers a number of four-year colleges from which to choose. “I think there are a wealth of opportunities around here so part of it is just making sure the students know about all of the opportunities.”

A number of factors have already influenced a student’s choice of major and college before the student gets to the community college campus—the advice of parents, friends, and the high school guidance counselor. “You know, the standards of learning get in the way of high school students coming,” opined the admissions counselor. “There has been a prejudice, shall we say, on the part of counselors in this area toward transfer as opposed to occupational-technical. Well, there have been counselors who have told students that ‘I’m disappointed in you that you chose a place like [a less-selective four-year college].’ There’s a counselor-elitism about people going on to universities—prestigious universities. I’ve found that interesting.”

Respondents saw another carry-over from high school as well—students who are unprepared for college-level course work. According to the faculty advisor, high schools “don’t expect what they ought to expect” from students. “I feel as though every time I teach the STD 100 (student development and orientation) class that I’m starting from scratch with students who don’t know what a research note is, or basic organizational schemes for composing even a written discourse, let alone a spoken discourse. They’ve never been asked to do that.” “Hand-holding” has been characteristic of the community
college’s faculty as well, he confessed, “but the faculty are disturbed by too much pampering of students at the community college. The community college is more personal and we try to assess the uniqueness of the student’s needs. Sometimes I think we give the wrong message to some students when they come here that we’re going to do everything for them.” Concurring that the college is trying to put more responsibility on the student for making transfer decisions, the dean pointed out that “we’re trying to move away from an institution where we tell students what to do, to be an institution where we help students decide what they want to be. And it’s a major change at this institution.”

Just as students sometimes are “totally clueless of how to take information that they get from another school and apply it to what they’re presently doing,” advisors also find it difficult to sort through transfer information. “I don’t think anybody can quite get a lasso around all the information.” The faculty advisor noted that faculty complain that “transfer information is fragmented and not widely distributed to advisors” and that “there’s so much change going on. All we can do is give advice.” And frequently, “people are given bad advice.”

“Often times the advice is bad because, for example, a counselor might not have known of something [a four-year college] did to change the requirement and the student might have taken extra courses that they didn’t need. Or worse, they haven’t taken courses that they did need.” Shaking his head, the faculty member admitted that when students ask questions, sometimes “I have no idea—no idea.” The recommended solution is always to advise students to consult the four-year institution to which they want to transfer.
The transfer coordinator relied heavily on printed materials as resources to assist students, and the information to which the students have access was not always consistent, timely, or complete. Written materials are provided annually by the colleges and universities, prompted by requests from the transfer coordinator, but “not all four-year colleges do that and it is very inconvenient. It’s wonderful to have it in writing. We do have access to the Internet.” Differences exist between public and private colleges and the way they respond to requests for information. “I must say that private schools are very good about sending out… information. The state-supported schools are the ones I have the most trouble getting the information from. And to be honest, they’re the ones that I need the most because most of the students that come here… do transfer to the public schools rather than the private institutions.” And “not all four-year institutions are willing to work with our students just on an information basis.” Noting that students sometimes have complained, “I’ve called so many times and nobody will answer my questions,” the transfer coordinator’s advice to students was “be persistent.”

But what effect has the state policy had on the receptiveness of four-year colleges to receiving community college transfers? The responses to that question were mixed, but the faculty member, who works one-on-one with students as a transfer advisor, admitted, “I don’t know much about the policy.” When asked directly about the policy, the transfer coordinator responded, “I have copies of it here for students to use and it’s available if they choose to have it. The one I have is a little bit older and I believe it’s the most current one, but I feel uncomfortable giving someone a document that’s dated a few years ago. I can’t say that I give it out an awful lot.”
The admissions counselor appeared to be quite familiar with the policy, but observed that “it’s lost some of its potency over the years. I think it could use a little ‘kick in the pants’ so to speak to get us back to having it at the tip of everybody’s tongue the way we used to. We always used to have it pinned to our bulletin board.” The dean was thoughtful in his response. “Well, I like the idea of such a document” but “I have people who work here who will tell you it’s not worth the paper it’s printed on. And for reasons of the four-year schools don’t all treat it in the same way.”

All of the staff agreed that because of the policy there are fewer transfer problems when the student completes the degree. The transfer coordinator hesitated slightly, then said, “I think the state has said—schools have said, if you finish this you will get junior status. Do all of those things count toward the major? Well, you may have to take some extra kinds of things, but we tend to find that when you’ve done the degree, people are a lot more comfortable.” In support of one four-year institution, the admissions counselor commented, “they just said ‘carte blanche’ anyone with an AA or an AS degree, other than general studies, has fulfilled lower division general ed. It was very straightforward.” The point made by the faculty member was that “straight-in transfer, from our two-year program into a four-year program in specific departments” is “pretty straightforward” if students use the college catalog to select courses—“not a whole lot of decision-making. Not a whole lot of mystery, just a matter of checking it out.”

All admitted, however, that “some four-year institutions are easier to transfer into than others...because some want to bicker with you about which literature class you’re taking...” As the registrar noted, “I think the biggest challenge is students figuring out exactly which courses will make the most efficient transfer package.” But even with the
degree, the faculty advisor noted, "[students] sometimes get into trouble. I don't know what protection they have when they execute [course] substitutions" in the program. For example, some courses that are taught at the community college are normally taught at the three hundred-level at the four-year institutions, and that can cause problems.

For students who choose to stay in the immediate area and continue their education, informants noted the benefits of signing a two-plus-two agreement, particularly with one local four-year university. Not only does the agreement help to clarify what the student needs to take at the community college, but also the student is "grand-fathered in under the old [requirements]" or the requirements in effect at the four-year institution when the student started at the two-year college. And "if they change their minds about the school or the curriculum, the agreement is not binding on them." If requirements change before students graduate, "they could come back and sign a new agreement."

The two-plus-two agreement, rather than the state transfer policy, was at the heart of the transfer program at this college. It reportedly carries more weight than any other resource the student has. According to the transfer coordinator, "once they sign that agreement, they follow what's on that sheet of paper, not what's in the college catalog." The agreement is understood to be binding on the institution and as providing protections for the student. "The agreement has been made between the officials of the two schools...and so if the student follows it as written, the agreement will lead to an associate's degree from us as well as prepare him or her for going into the four-year institution with the status of a junior."
"The power of the degree is that it all counts, whereas you’re taking your chances on the individual courses,” noted the dean. But some students either “will not realize that it’s generally to their advantage to get the associate’s degree before they transfer,” or they “have very legitimate reasons” for not completing the degree. According to the dean, the structure of the two-year degree can be problematic because of VCCS Table 5-1—a policy document that summarizes general education distribution requirements for degree programs. “The big bottom line there is that students are saying ‘I’m going to transfer before I get my degree because there are some courses in the degree that aren’t appropriate to the institution where I’m going.’” The biggest problem seems to be the college’s foreign language requirement. “It was that foreign language piece that kept getting in the way of most of our students.” Or as the admissions counselor argued, “a big issue for us is that bloody foreign language requirement in the liberal arts program, because none of the four-year schools require the second year, so the student refuses to take it, so that’s a completion issue—clearly a completion issue.”

According to the dean, another contributing factor to the college’s declining completion rate has been “that the four-year colleges are taking people earlier. There’s a lot of competition. When you can make a choice between going to [two local four-year institutions] on the public side and when you’ve got all the other colleges on the private side in this area, people don’t have to wait to have a degree finished. They can go early.” The institution to which most student transfer is “not saying finish the degree before you come” —even when the state policy calls on colleges to give preference for admissions to two-year graduates. “And they’re definitely not saying finish the general education courses before you come.”
Informants voiced consensus on the transfer module. By design, the block of 35 credits in selected courses was meant to transfer in total and would not be subject to a course-by-course evaluation. But if the benefits attached to the associate degree were perceived as the strongest piece of the state policy, the transfer module was perceived as its weakest clause. "The transfer module, on the other hand, never has struck me as something that particularly worked, or was all that useful. In theory, I think it's wonderful, but the reason I'm skeptical is that the four-year schools are all different animals—different entities." The data systems for the community colleges have limited the ability of colleges to note completion of the module on the student's transcript, and four-year colleges have had difficulty identifying a module completer to award block credit.

Essentially, the admissions counselor viewed the module as "false advertising"—promising acceptance of credits, but doing little to advance the student toward a baccalaureate degree. "The reason I'm skeptical isn't philosophical. It's pragmatic. It's just that we don't have a one-size-fits-all with four-year institutions in this state, so I worry that we are misleading students." The module is viewed as "a skeleton, and it works as a skeleton, but because it has to be tailored to each individual school, I worry about the confusion it could cause to the students." Clearly, the module "hasn't been as easy to explain and to sell as the degree program."

The dean also questioned the reliability of the module as a guarantee for students. "You know, when we say that these courses are accepted at 80% of the institutions, it's kind of like the time that my mother told me that she was going out to go whale-watching and she said, 'This is great. They're guaranteeing that 90% of the time we're going to
see whales." And I responded, 'What kind of a guarantee is that? Does that mean that on this trip you're going to see whales?'"

The consensus at the college is that the transfer policy has "lost" something over time. Although it was conceived as a way of facilitating transfer for the student, "on the four-year end, I perceive them going in even more diverse directions rather than coming together. Their uniqueness makes it impossible for us to prepare students in a uniform way. So that's the Catch-22, I think." And "the real problem with the state policy is we're trying to make a document that's going to apply state-wide and yet we've agreed that all the fourteen [public four-year] institutions can do things totally different from one another," reasoned the dean.

While pointing out weaknesses in the policy, staff also admitted that there are few problems when students transfer with the degree. "We tend to find that when you've done the degree, people are a lot more comfortable," commented the transfer coordinator. Even when students do not complete the degree, "I guess I'm not aware of a lot of problems. When students are transferring other than using the two-plus-two or other than getting the associate's degree, they generally work with the four-year college." The transfer coordinator characterized her experience with transfer by saying, "I see this kind of frustration more than problems between the four-year institutions and us."

The college proposed a number of solutions to improve transfer, and at the heart of the issue for all four respondents was the student's lack of planning or willingness to accept responsibility for transfer. In describing one student that had problems, the transfer coordinator said, "Her problem was no planning. It is their responsibility to select proper classes and to talk with the four-year institution." Focusing on the advising
process, then, is one way that the college can improve transfer, if the goal is to guide students toward making earlier and better decisions about where they want to transfer and what their major will be.

Another approach the college has taken is to examine the curriculum. "By in large, when most faculty see the courses are having difficulty transferring, they respond and make adjustments in the curriculum." The dean provided two examples. "Two areas that we see major differences with the schools around here is the foreign language, and the second one is in literature... Some of the four-years are no longer requiring a whole year of freshman English." The college was attempting to restructure its curriculum to provide greater flexibility in course selection to meet general education requirements for the associate degree. But at the same time "there is a struggle going on between what the four-year colleges want and what people here think a liberal arts degree should be."

Two of the respondents expressed strong feelings about the role of the state, as well, in improving transfer. The admissions counselor's view was that "until we turn into Florida and have a common course numbering system, I'm not really sure how to solve the problem." Another approach suggested by the dean was to increase efforts to enforce the existing policy. "We don't use the big stick enough to get institutions in line. And where we need to give institutions flexibility, we also need to use our clout to where it's more capricious and arbitrary to get people in line."

Finally, the dean recommended a fourth approach in dealing with transfer problems—changing the focus of the state policy from courses to "concepts." "Let's spell out concepts and not content." He provided examples from other states in which he has worked. In one state, core concepts were defined for general education, concepts
such as critical thinking. "So you have one institution that says you meet this concept if you have these courses. Another institution may have a whole different way of meeting those concepts. Each institution decided how. Again, it was a package that transfers," a "conceptual as opposed to course-based" package. Similarly, in another state, the Board of Regents defined "broad criteria" for "blocks" of general education and completed blocks were transferred between institutions rather than discrete courses. The dean advocated applying the "block" concept to the majors as well as to general education to increase the transferability and applicability of courses completed in the first two years at the community college.

One final solution recommended by the dean was to purchase a software package "that allowed the student to insert their degree that they’ve done. Then this package would list out for the student the top five institutions in the state where they would transfer and what percent of their credentials would transfer. If the State Council were to put something like that together, that would be one of the best investments we could do in this state."

The college staff who was interviewed identified as a significant problem for the college the lack of consistent transfer information from the four-year institutions. Perceptions of the effectiveness of the state policy were based primarily on anecdotal reports of students' experiences with transfer. College reports of transfer student success were lacking in systematic or quantitative evidence of student performance. But the few reports they did have were positive. "I have been told that the first semester is a little bit of a transition period for students, but generally after that, they do as well as students that are native to whichever four-year institution we're talking about." According to the
admissions counselor, the four-year college to which most of the college's students transfer is providing survey data on the success of transfers. "They gave us some information back and some if was not kind to their own institution. But they showed us the blemishes as well as the good parts. Students tended to say they felt very comfortable leaving here. They felt they were well-prepared." The admissions counselor also was pleased to report that "even when I was at [state public four-year institution], we grudgingly admitted that students transferring from [this community college] - actually the same was true from [another VCCS college], were more successful in the junior and senior level classes than our native freshmen. There were confounding variables there like age, maturity level and motivation, but we do seem to be preparing students very well."

**Virginia Four-year Institution A**

The four-year institution to which most of community college A's students transfer is a comprehensive public institution located in the peninsula. The current director for undergraduate advising was interviewed because of her previous position as associate director of admissions, Chief Transfer Officer, and co-chair of the statewide committee on transfer. Originally founded as a branch campus of another four-year public college, the institution moved from college to university status only within the past few years. Although the university is primarily a commuter institution, residence halls have recently been constructed on campus to attract and accommodate the more traditional student. The primary focus of university A is, according to its mission statement, "teaching and scholarship." And "as an American university with a global
perspective, [the university] enhances students' awareness and appreciation of the diversity that enriches us while building a community which unites us.”

The university published a transfer guide on the Web that highlights the community college transfer student. Not surprisingly, community colleges in the surrounding regions are significant “feeders” to the university’s student population. Without specific reference to the state transfer policy itself, two of the policy’s requirements were addressed in the university’s transfer information: (a) satisfaction of general education requirements with the associate degree, and (b) partial fulfillment of those requirements with completion of the “Council of Higher Education Transfer Module.” Detailed lists of recommended VCCS courses were published by major and unique requirements of individual majors were identified to assist transfer students in meeting prerequisites for upper-level classes in the majors.

Rather than publish the state transfer policy, university A published the institution’s Virginia Community College Articulation Policy, which clearly outlined parameters on the transferability of coursework from the VCCS colleges. The policy was modified in 1998 to exclude D grades from otherwise transferable courses. In addition to the state policy guarantees of junior standing with lower-division general education requirements satisfied, transfer students could expect: (a) to be “treated identically with regard to admission to competitive programs,” (b) normally to “be able to complete degree studies and major requirements in an additional two years of full-time study,” and (c) to complete requirements “that are in effect at [the university] at the time of transfer.” As further confirmation of their equitable treatment, VCCS transfer students were “eligible, while enrolled at the community college, for a [university] student...
identification card and afforded the same privileges and benefits as native students with respect to access to athletic and cultural events and the university’s library."

Although VCCS students had access to university activities, they did not have access to career and academic advising at the four-year institution. According to the university’s chief transfer officer (CTO), “we do have that rule that you have to be admitted to be able to use those resources. So VCCS students are going to have to talk with somebody in admissions because they do the evaluation of transfer credit.” The primary sources of transfer information were the “transfer guide for all the VCCS courses,” the “articulation agreements and the State Policy on Transfer, which drive many of the decisions for the community college students.”

Where appropriate, VCCS students at community college A, as well as those at two other regional VCCS colleges, were encouraged to sign two-plus-two agreements for transferring both the university-parallel and the applied science degree programs. Clearly, the university was interested in facilitating a smooth transition from two-year colleges to the four-year institution.

But according to the university’s chief transfer officer, “the mission of the institution in the last five to six years has changed. We have moved from being an institution in the community without residence halls, to an institution with residence halls that is actively recruiting the traditionally-aged student.” As a result, “transfer students are no longer the majority.” This shift in mission has been marked by one other change. With rising standards in the public high schools as a result of the new state Standards of Learning, the university has “moved toward higher expectations on the transfer students coming in.”
“The admissions office has the responsibility of doing the evaluation of transfer credit,” explained the chief transfer officer, who is confident that “the processes and the policies that support the evaluation of transfer credit here have given us a very good framework to do that work once, and not necessarily have to come back and renegotiate it” —even if the student changes majors. “But the policy is set by the faculty and delegated to admissions to do that evaluation” and “questions about specifics are always referred back to the faculty.”

While faculty decisions could be somewhat arbitrary regarding course equivalencies, the university appeared to be flexible in the way VCCS courses were applied to meeting the general education requirements. “If the student can show us that a like requirement will be satisfied at another institution, then the same requirement will be satisfied here. So a humanities for a humanities.” Noting that “wherever we can help the student out without jeopardizing the curriculum or prerequisites, that is done,” the CTO stressed the importance of applying the policies equitably. “If an allowance is made for one student then that same allowance can be made for the next student coming along.” If that does not happen, “the grapevine works, and then it becomes very difficult to defend your policy.” Besides, commented the CTO, “I don’t think you’ll ever have the same courses taught everywhere, and why would you want to? How boring! There are different faculty on every campus with different areas of expertise.”

Nevertheless, challenging problems still prevented the smooth transfer of credits from the two-year colleges—challenges that could not be resolved on the basis of the state policy. For example, a state mandate in 1995 required colleges and universities to limit the length of the baccalaureate degree to 120 semester hours of credit. Faculty at
university A responded “by making gen eds shorter and putting the credits in the major to stay at 120. It changed the value of that currency—of how efficient it made the associate degree coming into the institution.” The result was that VCCS students transferred an excess of elective credit. “Right now, the university has a general ed requirement of about 51 semester hours, so the associate of arts is at 63? The business degree is at 61? So even at that, it’s 10 credits more than what a native student would do.”

Perhaps the biggest challenge for both the two- and the four-year colleges was the student who could not make a decision, or the one who changed his or her mind about a major. Because community college students often were unsure of their plans and might elect to take the path to an applied degree and quick employment, “the biggest challenge that a Virginia community college counselor had” was to help students understand “the difference between an applied science degree and a transferable degree program.”

Students were often frustrated when they learned that without a specific two-plus-two agreement, their applied degrees would not necessarily advance them toward a baccalaureate, and “you hate for them to lose their motivation and not go on.” At the four-year institution, “it’s our job to say to the community college transfer student who is unsure of a major, you have a decision to make because I can no longer recommend courses that you can take that will work no matter what your major’s going to be.”

Although the CTO saw the state policy as a “problem-solver” for the degree completer, the most vulnerable student was the one who chose to transfer to the university before completing the associate degree. Without the guarantees provided by the state transfer policy, the student was subject to a course-by-course evaluation of the transferability of credits. But one impetus for not completing the associate degree was
the structure of the degree itself. "I think in the last five years I hear more students talk about walking away from the associate degree because there are hours required in the associate degree they know they will not need to take at the four-year institution." But "on the plus side, I hear them saying the preparation they have had has been exactly what they needed and that they're not having trouble adjusting to the four-year curriculum and expectations."

Referring to other limitations of the state policy, the CTO also noted that "not transferring Ds is still out there as an issue. The state policy says that the requirement is satisfied, but you'll still find four-year institutions that will not transfer a D grade, and I think it's their right to say that the D doesn't transfer, and that's the only real disjuncture that I have with the State Policy on Transfer right now."

Reasons for some of the frustrations expressed by community college A concerning the transferability of credit were also reflected in what the CTO from university A had to say about the way the university has implemented the state transfer policy. Both the university and the community college agreed that the most efficient mechanism for transferring credit was the two-plus-two agreement because it provided guidance for the major as well as for general education. Although there was a statewide policy on transfer, the most effective means of facilitating transfer was viewed as the inter-institutional agreement.

Whereas the university assessed the weakest clause in the state policy to be the reference to the transferability of D grades, the community college was most dissatisfied with the transfer module and the arbitrary way in which module courses were applied to meeting requirements for the baccalaureate degree. Both university A and community
college A acknowledged a decrease in the number of students completing the two-year transfer degree, and both recognized the structure of the associate degree as a major obstacle to degree completion. But the community college attributed the decline in graduates also to increased competition between four-year institutions for students, something not acknowledged by the university CTO.

While the CTO at university A argued the rights of the four-year institution to determine whether or not it should accept D grades, the community college argued that the state did not exert enough clout or influence to force four-year institutions to comply with the state policy. Nevertheless, both acknowledged the importance of helping students accept responsibility for making career and academic decisions and for making appropriate choices of courses and programs to advance them toward achieving their goals.

Virginia Community College B

College B was selected for this study as an outlier institution—the community college identified as having the lowest level of transfer activity in the VCCS for the years included in the study. Located in the far southwestern region of the state, the college serves two small cities and the surrounding county. Proximity to the state border affects student enrollment patterns because of the number of out-of-state institutions within commuting distance of the college. Now a comprehensive institution, the college opened in 1969-70 to provide the post-secondary occupational-technical programs formerly offered by the county’s technical school. The second year of post-secondary studies was added to the college’s curriculum in 1972. And in the mid-1990s, a higher education center was built on the grounds of the community college. Five of the state’s public four-
year institutions offer courses, programs and services through the center as “partners in education” with the community college.

The fall enrollment for the academic year 1999-2000 was slightly over 2000 students, 26% of which were classified as transfer degree-seeking students—below the VCCS average of 33%. The college offers a single Associate in Arts and Sciences transfer degree and several Associate in Applied Science degree programs in occupational-technical areas. Almost 40% of the students at the college were enrolled in occupational-technical programs, and less than half of the students were enrolled full-time. The percentage of transfer degree graduates who enrolled at a Virginia four-year public institution in the fall semester immediately following graduation declined from 18% in 1993-94 to 12% in 1995-96, but increased to 19% in 1996-97, still well below the 42% average for the VCCS. At the same time, those graduates enrolling in state private institutions rose steadily from 16% in 1993-94 to 21% in 1996-97. Data on graduates from occupational-technical degree programs showed that only about seven percent enrolled in a four-year institution immediately following graduation. And although applied degrees are not specifically designed to transfer, one in three of all graduates who transferred to a four-year institutions were graduates with applied degrees.

The college’s mission statement printed online reflected the importance placed on providing opportunities in the local community for citizens “to develop skills, extend knowledge, and increase awareness of their roles and responsibilities in society.” The college emphasized educational programs and services that “nurture and satisfy cultural interests” and “support economic development in the region.” “Diversity,” “rapid change,” “quality of life,” and “career preparation” were key words used multiple times.
in the college's statement of purpose. Transfer education was referenced only once in a long list of college goals, yet access to transfer information is highlighted throughout the college's website.

In describing the college's programs of study, the catalog lists the college transfer degrees first, with the goals being (a) "to offer the student a widely accepted program of general preparation for upper-division work in his/her chosen professional field, stressing a balance of required courses common to most baccalaureate degree programs," and (b) "to offer maximum flexibility so that the student may select specific courses that may be required at the college or university to which transfer is contemplated." The focus on "widely accepted," "balanced," and "maximum flexibility" reflected sensitivity to the high degree of variability in requirements students confront when they try to transfer to four-year institutions.

The applied degree programs were also described as a transfer option for students. Although "designed to prepare the student for employment, ... a growing number of colleges and universities are offering Bachelor degree programs built upon the community college AAS degree." Based on the documents published online, transfer thus appeared to be an important goal of all of the college's degree programs.

The state transfer policy was not specifically mentioned, yet the emphasis in the descriptions of the transfer programs was on the importance of completing the degree. "In order to prepare for upper division (junior) standing at a four-year college or university, the student usually must complete a program at the community college which is comparable in length and courses to the first two years of the program at the four-year college or university." Rather than direct students who are unsure of their plans to the
transfer module in the state policy, the college recommended the college’s Liberal Arts and Education majors for “students who may not have clear educational goals but who know they want to transfer.” The college’s online information also included a link to the higher education center and the five public institution partners. Clearly, degree completion and transfer were important goals.

Although the intent in this study was to conduct individual interviews to gather additional data, the dean had arranged a group interview with a division chair with responsibility for transfer programs, a transfer counselor, and a student development specialist. To enhance the group interview results, an individual follow-up interview was conducted several weeks later with the transfer counselor.

Although enrollment figures at the college indicated that a fourth of the students were enrolled in a transfer curriculum, the staff’s perception was that transfer plays a more important role in the mission of the institution than the numbers might reflect. “I see it as a 50-50 proposition with the total college. A lot of students are interested in pursuing and going on.” The division chair noted “when I first came to the community college, one of the things that I heard was that [it] was a good little liberal arts college, and I think it’s because we have a large number of students who come to us for the core curriculum—for the arts and sciences degree.” A counselor added, “[the college] has been misinterpreted locally as offering four-year degrees because of the higher education center located on the campus” (a facility that offers courses from a number of four-year institutions).

The role of the applied degree in preparing students for transfer also was noted. “We have more and more of our students coming out of our applied degrees who
transfer—police science, general engineering, electronics, IST. Those are all applied degrees.” A major factor contributing to enrollments in applied degree programs was that “[students] have family responsibilities and financial obligations and so they have to work. So they’ll come into the applied degree, get those skills, get a job, and continue with the general core curriculum and then follow up with the bachelor’s degree. With the advent of the higher ed center, that has really opened up the door for those type of students.”

Providing opportunities for students who might not otherwise continue their education was seen as an important part of the college’s mission. “I think that part of our mission is to educate and inform and provide opportunities for students. I think oftentimes that students come to us with unclear goals. For one thing, their information is limited.” The transfer counselor also noted the importance of transfer in achieving the college mission. “I think it number one proves that we are an institution that gives a quality education. A lot of people can’t afford to go elsewhere. We play an important role to get those people’s feet wet and get their appetites going for more. College is not for everybody, but I think that everybody should have the opportunity to try.”

The view that both the arts and sciences and the applied degrees serve a transfer function may be attributed partially to the way the college faculty is viewed. “We have a particularly strong faculty in some of the general ed, but we have a particularly strong faculty also in the OT area. We have a mutual admiration society in the faculty.” And another thing, “we don’t have developmental faculty who teach developmental math or who teach developmental English. The same English instructor teaches both developmental and college-level. The faculty is integrated.”
Another factor contributing to the blurring of lines between the transfer and the occupational-technical programs was the "articulation agreement that we have with the schools that are close at hand." Depending on the student's curriculum, some colleges award junior standing to students coming out of applied programs. "Oftentimes we modify the applied degrees so that where possible we'll recommend the higher level [core classes]," depending on what the student wants to do.

The key is in knowing what the student wants to do. As the transfer counselor noted, "When we can get to a student early, we can direct early intervention." He went on to say "I think that students have to make earlier decisions about major and transfer—choices of transfer school." The earlier students make those decisions, the easier it is to advise students into appropriate classes, but as the division chair noted with regret, "I am of the mindset that we rush students into deciding what they're going to do for the rest of their lives." Students must make a difficult choice between the arts and sciences and the applied degrees, or run the risk of taking courses that will not advance them toward their ultimate goal of a baccalaureate degree.

More emphasis appeared to be placed on advising than on printed materials as student resources for transfer information. The quality of advising was seen as greatly affecting students' progress toward their goals. "To me you have advisors and you have advisors. They're not trained. Some do a much better job than others." But "if the student is going to receive the necessary information to get them where they want to go, they need to have someone who is caring and concerned for their direction" and knowledgeable about how to get there. "If a student is interested in going into a bachelor's of social work, they don't necessarily need to be in the human services
(applied) curriculum. They need to be in a general studies curriculum taking sociology
courses as electives so that they're completing the core requirements at an institution."

Economics is an important consideration when students are deciding whether or
not to enroll in a transfer degree program, or to transfer to an institution out of the local
area. "One thing I’ve noticed here, when the economy’s bad, our transfer curriculums are
booming. But we have numbers in the transfer curriculum the first year and only half the
students the second year. They all don’t transfer [early]." Presumably, they go to work,
but many students also choose to transfer out of state, "paying out of state tuition [rather
than going to Virginia public four-year colleges] because they have to commute or pick
up and move, which would mean a loss of job for one or two spouses." When asked if
the higher education center was an attractive alternative, the transfer counselor explained
that the program offerings there are too limited to be of interest to most of their students.

The state transfer policy appeared to have had little direct effect on transfer
advising. Informants focused not on the policy, but on the importance of completing the
associate degree and its value as a “core curriculum.” "We encourage those students to
complete the associate degree here, to recognize its value in transfer. It pays off for our
students to complete the associate degree because of the articulation agreements that offer
them junior status and no evaluation of a course-by-course transcript." Articulation
agreements the college has with two of Virginia’s public four-year institutions actually
guarantee admissions—a guarantee not required by the state policy and found in very few
transfer agreements. And although the transfer module was seen as "represent[ing] the
general core, if a student is in a transfer program, then they fulfill the module anyway.
We value the associate degree."
The college's view on the transfer module component of the policy was "throw the transfer module out of the window." Although "the module is in the [four-year] transfer guide, all schools differ in what they require." According to the counselors, "transfer is easiest with the transfer guide" and the course equivalency tables that outline recommended courses by major. "The transfer module doesn't tell a student what history course to take. The transfer guide does. So I really emphasize the transfer guide more than the transfer module." As the transfer counselor noted, the strength of the policy is that it "gives us energy and a footing for articulating. The big shots need to lay the groundwork, but as far as the module goes, faculty to faculty would be more helpful to me."

One interesting perspective offered on the state policy was that "it's been beneficial to us in articulating with private institutions. We can say here's what the state is doing, and they've matched it and bettered it. They're more flexible in terms of the courses that apply, and they associate money with the degree" by awarding transfer scholarships. Although not bound by the state policy, "the private schools have been much more cooperative in terms of accepting courses than the state." The explanation offered was that the state "may be controlled by guidelines, whereas the private schools can do their own thing."

Although opportunities have declined in recent years, one incentive that has contributed to student interest in out-of-state institutions is the common market agreement—"a reciprocal agreement that if the student's not able to get a major specifically listed, and it usually implies that those majors were not readily available to students in southwest Virginia, then they can go out of state and receive in-state tuition..."
rates.” Again, economics and proximity were mentioned as the two factors that weigh heavily on students’ transfer decisions.

The college was confident that their “students are well prepared.” According to the division chair, “our students do well when they go. They are prepared for advanced courses in science or math, wherever.” Acceptance rates at four-year colleges also were evaluated as “pretty good.” “The schools around here like our students because they feel our students have a good solid background when they come to their institution.” One counselor acknowledged that the students they work with “are not real math proficient. Math for liberal arts is about as far as their competency will take them, which is sufficient for economics, sociology, and education.”

The consensus in the group interview was that the influence of the state policy on transfer is declining. “It seems we’re growing apart ever since the 120 semester-hour and 60 semester hour thing was laid on us. It seems the emphasis was on articulation agreements, but it seems now that they’ve eliminated some of our basic courses so we’re drawing apart.” Problems with the policy were clearly course-based. For example, informants pointed out that transferring dual credit and distance learning courses has been problematic at some four-year institutions. But as one counselor explained, “they have no problems with our dual enrollment folks who have shown they’re very well prepared, but dual enrollment folks at other schools can’t even pass the math placement test.” The solution proposed by the transfer coordinator for the problem of inconsistent quality in the VCCS was to make community college programs more “comparable in nature.” “I think that would make it easier for the four-year colleges to almost give us a blanket
articulation agreement"—apparently something the current policy does not provide and the VCCS as a system of colleges cannot expect.

Virginia Four-year Institution B

Community college B did not identify a primary public four-year institution to which a majority of its students transfer. Transfer was viewed as important to the college's mission for both the university-parallel and the occupational-technical degree programs, and the community college argued that private and out-of-state institutions, not bound by the state policy, were more accommodating to two-year transfer students. The college identified economics and geographical proximity as the most important factors in explaining transfer activity, and out-of-state institutions attracted a large percentage of community college B's graduates. Although no interviews were conducted with a public four-year institution related to community college B, the online catalogs of two nearby four-year colleges and universities were examined for references to the transfer policy and community college students.

The first of these colleges was a four-year branch of a prestigious state university. Students transferring from a community college were directed to a special section in the online catalog that guaranteed admission to associate degree graduates from university-parallel degree programs who have earned a 2.2 grade point average. Guaranteed admission to the college "does not necessarily guarantee admission to any of the various majors or programs within the college."

The catalog stated that the college "adheres to the State Policy on Transfer," and that associate degree graduates "will have met the lower division general education requirements of the college, except for six semester hours of foreign language. These
students will be classified as juniors, and will be given preference in the admissions process.”

The catalog also addressed the transfer module by outlining which of the general education requirements were fully and partially met by completion of the module. Module completers also were “given preference in the admissions process.” Students from community college B, as well as those from two other regional community colleges, were advised to “inquire about the Guaranteed Admission Program (GAP),” which promised “special assistance in planning their academic programs to ease the transition.” Application fees were waived for GAP students, but no further details about the program were available in the catalog.

An online transfer guide did provide clear information on course equivalencies, but even with the guarantee of admission for two-year graduates, students from community college B chose to go elsewhere—primarily because of the commute, but also because of the four-year college’s image. “University B needs to change their image in students’ minds that they’re not the [parent institution],” the CTO explained. “You’d think being right in our area or locale would be a drawing card for students, but it’s not. I don’t know whether there’s some history there of conflict between us, or what. But it’s not a big drawing card.”

The second public four-year institution’s catalog that was examined advertised that it “understands the special needs of transfer students” and that transfer students “will find the answers they need on the Web pages.” Links were provided to a number of useful sites for additional information on campus life, including a community college transfer guide to course equivalencies by major. Although course equivalencies were
listed in a separate section of the guide for the transfer module, the state policy was not referenced anywhere in the general transfer information. The impression left was that all transfer credit was evaluated on a course-by-course basis with no special consideration given to associate degree graduates.

Virginia Community College C

Community college C was selected as the community college with the strongest transfer activity over the years included in the study. The third largest college in the system, college C has three campuses—a rural, a suburban, and an inner city campus, serving a diverse population of students in a major metropolitan area in central Virginia. A large urban public four-year university and three private four-year colleges are also located in the surrounding area. The fall 1999 enrollment was 10,310 students, only 23% of which were enrolled full-time. Nearly half the students enrolled were unclassified in terms of their majors, and one in five students were enrolled in a college transfer degree program. One third of the students were enrolled in an occupational-technical program.

Based on figures from 1993-1997, the percentage of transfer degree graduates who enrolled at a Virginia public four-year institution in the fall semester immediately following graduation rose from 49% in 1993-94 to over 58% in 1995-96 and then dropped to approximately 55% in 1996-97. The percent of graduates that enrolled in private four-year institutions declined one-half percent during that same period. Data on graduates from occupational-technical degree programs showed that one in ten enrolled in a public four-year institution in 1993-94, but that percentage dropped to slightly less that eight percent in 1996-97. Although applied degrees are not generally intended to prepare students for transfer, graduates from occupational-technical programs comprised
from a high of 39% in 1993-94, to a low of almost 26% in 1996-97, of all graduates transferring to public four-year institutions. The percent of transfer students who graduated with an applied degree and enrolled in a private institution remained steady at about 36% after jumping to almost 65% in 1994-95. These data suggested that private institutions were more receptive to receiving graduates of applied programs than were the public four-year colleges and universities.

The college’s vision was clearly articulated in the phrase “opening doors, changing lives,” which was prominent on college publications. The key words in the college’s mission statement published online were “service” and “community” in the context of principles and values focused on “people,” “learning,” “excellence,” and “ethics.” The term “university parallel” curricula rather than “transfer” was used in reference to the programs that “serve students seeking four-year college readiness.” The emphasis appeared to be on learning and changing the student rather than on the goal of transfer itself.

In describing programs of “university parallel study,” the college catalog was clear that “each university has different requirements for baccalaureate programs,” and that “earned credits in the program are generally transferable to the senior college or university and applicable toward a bachelor’s degree.” No guarantees were made about the transferability or applicability of courses, except in the case where the college has had “articulation agreements for specific academic programs.” According to the catalog, “such agreements guarantee that the student with the associate degree has complete transferability of all credits. A student transferring prior to the receipt of the ... degree is
not assured of such status.” The catalog then listed specific majors for which the student would be prepared.

The catalog was also clear that although not designed for transfer purposes, courses in the applied degree programs might be accepted by some four-year institutions. However, “it is the responsibility of the four-year institution to determine and publish its policies on the admission of transfer students and the criteria for determining the acceptability of transfer credits completed at another institution.” Students were encouraged to see their advisors to select appropriate courses.

Although the catalog information online included a brief reference to the state transfer policy, the benefits of the policy and the transfer module were not described. The focus was on the articulation agreements—“formal arrangements” that cover “the conditions for student transfer.” The institutions with which the college has such agreements were listed prominently, including public, private, and out-of-state schools.

A unique feature of the catalog description of transfer opportunities was the “transfer assistance profile,” or TAP. Designed to provide students with “accurate and timely transfer course information,” students can use the system to match the courses they have taken to the requirements at selected four-year institutions to determine the best fit. Also available online were links to many of the four-year colleges in the state, with descriptions about their college and programs.

Three separate interviews were conducted at the college: one with the enrollment services specialist who has the role of transfer coordinator; one with the faculty coordinator for transfer student advising (who also serves on the State Committee on
Transfer), and one with the director for academic programs (a former member of the 
State Committee on Transfer).

In discussing the importance of the transfer function to the mission of the 
community college, the faculty advisor responded "the college takes a very strong view 
on transfer." Similarly, the director of academic programs acknowledged that "transfer at 
[the college] is a very significant part of our mission." The transfer coordinator noted 
"it's in the college's mission statement that we need to increase the transfer rates by a 
certain percentage that would assure... and that when they transfer to the four-year 
institutions, they would have a GPA of 3.0."

Transfer was described as being an important part of the community college's 
mission as a comprehensive institution—especially in terms of serving under-served 
populations. "In '83 we were one of 26 community colleges in the country to get this 
initial Ford Foundation grant to encourage urban kids to come to the community college, 
major in transfer programs, and transfer to four-year institutions." A program funded by 
the State Council for Higher Education also gave impetus to serving hard-to-serve 
populations. "SCHEV, since '85-'86 supported the Virginia Student Retention and 
Recruitment program," which evolved from a summer transition program, "then we 
changed it to a baccalaureate transition, and now it's the teacher ed part." The transfer 
coordinator felt a special calling to serve these students. "That's my specialty—working 
with the student that never thought they could get a bachelor's degree, the ones, the 
average students, or below average students, in high school. I really push hard to 
encourage them to get degrees."
The director noted that the emphasis on transfer had shifted somewhat over the years. "There was a point at which we placed greater emphasis on transfer as opposed to occupational-technical—the non-transfer curricula. That was evidenced in the fact that we went through curricula changes. It was about '85 or '86 where we made this conscious effort to abandon OT English and require the transfer English" in all curricula. "And this was because students were coming in at a point in their curriculum and saying now I want to transfer." But "now there is shift back to clearly separate transfer from OT. In some cases we are just requiring the occupational-technical or the applications course vs. the transfer course. And in other instances we're giving the student the option and advising them about what the options mean."

The impetus for that switch appeared to be the emphasis the college placed on student success. "We do have as our mission student success," and the key to student success was viewed as making sure students are adequately prepared. The applications courses were taught at a different level than the transfer courses, so requiring OT students to complete college transfer courses put those students at high risk for failure. "The courses become high risk for those students who don’t have that preparation. And that’s a major thrust here."

Another way the college attacked the preparation issue in student success was through the developmental program. The transfer coordinator told students that "we’re willing to invest our time and energy with you to see that you can be successful in our transfer courses, and [requiring developmental courses] is the way that we do that. Chances are that you stand a far greater chance of being successful than if you didn’t [complete developmental courses].” In advising students to take developmental courses,
the faculty advisor “[doesn’t] want to discourage them, but I think they need to know all
the information possible so they can make their decisions,” and helping students to
understand the challenges and face their limitations was a part of the process.

The transfer coordinator was committed to “doing everything it takes to get a
student from here to a four-year institution. Everything.” Yet the faculty member
admitted, “many of our faculty advisors don’t want to spend the time and the energy to
really do a good job of transfer.” The college offered a number of resources to assist
students—transfer guides, the TAP program, testing, and access (or “one-stop”) centers
with career counseling and access to electronic information. But the kind of information
and assistance the student needs is dependent on the student. “It’s important that they
know what they want to do in terms of curriculum and where they want to go,” but many
students “aren’t sure where they want to transfer and don’t have a clue about what they
want to take and what they want to be” the faculty advisor observed.

In those cases, the role of the advisor was seen as critical to student success.
Advising is “not something everybody likes to do and that not everybody does well.” But
“if we leave it up to self-advised students or faculty who are not in the know, that student
is going to be ill-prepared,” commented the director. “We need to separate out
registration from advising. The student can self-register, but not self-advise. I think that
self-advising is appropriate for only a few because of all the quirks and all the places they
may go and all of the different kinds of things and expectations that all those places have
for them. So there are very few people that can get through a transfer curriculum alone
and be totally successful.”
Communicating transfer requirements to students was important, but equally important was the structure of the associate degree curriculum. The transfer faculty advisor believed the college’s general education curriculum should be as “fluid” and “as flexible as the student needs for it to be.” Acknowledging that it “is not the opinion of some other people at the institution,” she nevertheless saw the community college “as being a conduit for the students to move from here to the four-year, and that our curriculum is not the be-all, end-all.” The director expressed a similar view that the college should be “offering those courses that the four-year are. We’re serving the four-year institutions in that regard. We need to provide students with what the four-years are requiring.” And yet, “our curricula are not always developed and maintained particularly for a particular institution. We just don’t do that.” Nonetheless, flexibility also had its problems. “The way our curricula are developed, it leaves a lot of guesswork. Students have to become familiar with what the four-years are requiring.”

The perception of the college most frequently expressed by the informants was that the college supports an environment similar to a small college or university. According to the transfer coordinator, “we’re not just a technical school, and we’re not just a school where you can come and get skills. A part of this college appeals to and educates students at the university level.” She went on to explain that “we have an environment that’s kind of like a private school where you can go and take intro courses and have only fifteen and twenty in your class.”

This perception of the college as being “like a university” is reflected in the way the college characterized its relationship with four-year institutions as “partnerships.” “There’s a connection that both community colleges and four-year institutions
understand—that what we want to do is to make it possible for most people to get the
most out of their education with the least amount of difficulty” explained the faculty
advisor. When a student runs into an obstacle, “I just pick up the phone and call a
counterpart [at the four-year] and we’ll figure this out.”

The sense was “that there are [four-year] institutions who are more reasonable
than others in trying to work through problems, but breaking down the barriers is possible
with persistence. The transfer coordinator provided this example. The community
college was having difficulty with transferring math courses to one four-year institution.
“The perception was that the math at the community college was quite diluted,” but the
two-year faculty insisted that the content was equivalent to the four-year course. The
colleges agreed to a faculty exchange to teach the other’s math course. “Now what better
way to show them than to bring them over to teach it and vice versa?” The program was
highly successful.

One other approach the college took to facilitate transfer has not been quite as
successful. The Transfer Assistance Profile (TAP)—a computerized system for matching
two- and four-year courses, “is obsolete now.” Although highly successful for several
years, the electronic transfer guide has waned in its effectiveness as an advising tool. At
one time the college had someone who “used to be doing only that, and had gone to a lot
of other community colleges to set up their computer systems so that they could do what
we are doing. Now that’s not always accurate because she doesn’t have the time to plug
in all the changes that occur year to year.”

The faculty transfer advisor was particularly concerned about the potential
liability of mis-advising a student based on TAP. “If we mis-advised them, then I think
about the only thing that we can do is to say ‘I goofed, and this is what you need to do.’ I don’t think that there’s anything in place where we can give them their money back or whatever. I know that there are states where that is in place, and if we screw up then we’re responsible.” The difficulty is in keeping track of requirements that are “so program to program specific, institution to institution specific, it seems there’s a new one every time you turn around.”

What role does the state transfer policy play in facilitating transfer? Several words were used to describe the state policy—a mandate, a backdrop, a contract, and an agreement. “We reference [the policy] in the sense that it’s mandated, that there are certain things that we’re mandated to do. We quote it at various meetings at [the college], but beyond that I’m not sure that as an institutional practice what we do.” The strength of the mandate was implied in the comment of the academic director that “if a program is designed as transfer, then it does not need to be articulated,” but the policy serves “as a backdrop” to distinguish the need for articulation agreements for occupational-technical programs that are not covered under the mandates of the state policy.

The faculty advisor was clear that the state policy represents a “contractual arrangement” between the student and the institutions. Graduation from a transfer program “means that [the student] could enter [the four-year institution] as a junior with their general education requirements fulfilled.” The transfer coordinator also “encourages [students] to graduate from [the community college] because of all the issues that go along with transferring as juniors. But “even though the student gets a degree here and transfers, if they have not had that U.S. history component, I think they would
still have to take it even with the degree.” On a course by course basis, “the AA and AS agreement has a lot of flaws in it—a lot of flaws.”

Other assurances in the “contract” also are not clearly understood. The faculty advisor “thought that all [course grades] had to be a C or better, and I thought that was the policy. A student doesn’t always have to have a C or better in a course to transfer if they have the degree.” The practice is, however, that “some institutions, if six credits are Ds, they may find that [the student doesn’t] meet the institutional requirements for being a junior. But that’s not what the policy says. I think we need to tighten that up a tad. We say it in the transfer module that Cs are required but we don’t say it in the degree. I think that’s where it sometimes comes back to haunt.”

Rather than as a mandate, or a contract, respondents viewed the transfer module of the state policy more specifically as a binding agreement. According to the faculty advisor, “when all else fails, I bring out this transfer module. These are the courses I know will transfer because we’ve made this agreement.” When asked about the module, the transfer coordinator confessed, “I’ve never used it. I mean there wouldn’t be any reason for me to use it because [philosophically] we wanted to encourage degrees and the transfer module maintains the same old perception—I’ll just go and take a few classes.”

In spite of the problems noted, the college’s view on the policy was positive. “I think it’s one of the best things that we’ve done as an overall measure to help make this as seamless as we can. We’ve made a connection and I think connectedness is the bottom line, even if there are little quirky things.” Another informant quipped “I think it’s wonderful. Makes life happy!” But on a more serious note, she opined “I like it all but the module. I think it’s great because [the policy] is coming from the top saying you
all have to comply. It opens the doors and gets people talking from two- and four-year institutions. Resolves issues.” And finally, the director noted “it was good that it was enacted. If it did nothing else, it placed us all on notice—two-year and four-year publics, indeed the privates too, that this state is serious about the facilitation of transfer. And maybe that interest is largely out of economics. I’m not sure, but it makes sense.”

The sense was, however, that not all of the transfer-related issues have been resolved by the policy. “Now that we have that, my question would be what’s the next step?” Or as the transfer coordinator framed the issue, “the State Committee that was established as part of that policy has done a lot to help insure that transfer is a lot smoother than it was previously. We need to move to the next level, and that is to work through other barriers that exist.” One of those barriers is meeting requirements in the major. “[Students] find themselves in some jeopardy when they get where they’re going, because although they’ve finished all their general ed, they then have program problematic issues that we need to work through.”

Reports of transfer student success are based primarily on anecdotal evidence, but clearly, the college believes that “transfer students are doing so well.” According to the academic director, “it’s been a couple of years since I’ve seen any kind of data, but in aggregate form it did tell us how our students are doing compared to native students at four-year institutions. Some of it was very encouraging and some of it was not.” Some of the data indicate “that the graduation rate of our transfer students [at the four-year college] is slightly higher than the native students.”

Anecdotally, however, “students tell us that we’ve done a great job in preparing them for their four-year matriculation. I’ve heard students say that if it were not for [the
college] they would not be where they are completing a four-year degree.” And the
transfer coordinator painted a slightly different picture in noting “because of the nature of
my work and the focus that I have (it’s on the urban kids and they’re always the most
grateful), I hear from them because they want you to know that they’re doing fine.”

Virginia Four-year Institution C

The strength of the transfer relationship between community college C and
university C was apparent from both published materials and interviews with college
personnel. The associate dean of the college of science and humanities was interviewed
because of his roles as Chief Transfer Officer at the institution and co-chair of the
statewide committee on transfer. Like community college C, university C is located in
the heart of a large metropolitan area. As a large, urban, public research university, it is a
national leader in medical research and has built a reputation for its school of the arts.
The student population is “diverse in age, ability, racial and ethnic background,
international origin, religious affiliation, in addition to many other ways”—an attractive
climate for the community college student who typically comes from a non-traditional
higher education background.

One of the defining characteristics of university C was public service and
outreach. Included in the university’s strategic plan was an off-campus program
initiative in the health sciences through collaboration with a VCCS college and area
hospitals that were located one hundred miles away. But the vision for the university, as
described in the strategic plan, was “to be a model of diversity in higher education,” by
“undertaking a comprehensive initiative to achieve curricula, scholarly opportunities,
public service activities, and a campus climate that truly supports diversity.”
University C published both Web and print-based documents to provide detailed information for transfer students, with a special section devoted to the agreement between community college C and the university’s college of humanities and sciences. The university clearly welcomed applications from community college students, especially those who have earned the associate degree, and a discussion of the state transfer policy was placed prominently at the beginning of the university’s transfer guide. Community college students who have completed a transfer associate degree “will have junior standing and will be considered to have met all lower-division general education requirements with the exception of certain lower-level and upper-level program requirements that also apply to all students.”

The comprehensive transfer guide “lists the general education requirements for the first two years in each school and the college, and identifies transferable VCCS courses that will satisfy these requirements.” This format was particularly useful to community college students who have made decisions about their majors. “Students also are encouraged to consult with their community college counselor and to write or call the university contact person for their intended area of study indicated in the directory.” This referral to the counselor at the community college in a university publication was evidence of the good relationship between the two institutions.

As the chief transfer officer for the university, the associate dean for the college of humanities and sciences has taken on the role of interpreting the state transfer policy and operationalizing it for the institution. As a long-time member of the state committee on transfer, he has monitored the implementation process statewide and has been keenly aware of transfer issues. When asked how transfer fits into the mission of his own
university, he responded “welcoming transfer students has always been part of that mission, and I’ve never known it to be any different. I guess I’d be hard pressed—I’d have to get a bulletin to see if there’s even anything in there about it. It’s just presumed.”

“Though the university is a selective institution to some degree in the sense that we actually reject lots of freshmen, it isn’t open admission” like the community colleges. But the university worked closely with community colleges to ensure that students were prepared to transfer. “We had put together our own articulation with the community college system probably a year before the state policy got going.”

Once the student was admitted, the university had “a fairly decentralized system of dealing with transfer credit.” Decisions were made in each of the university’s undergraduate schools. To limit arbitrariness in transcript evaluations, the associate dean “put together a three or four page document that was kind of like a dos and don’ts of evaluation of transfer credit—a lot of policy issues that are translated into how you do things with students.”

Every attempt was made to clarify for the student what the expectations were so that credit evaluation was a smooth process. Resources such as the transfer guide were published online as well as in print. “I guess it’s easy to say check the web site, but I don’t think there’s anything better than a well-equipped community college counselor to help students through.” The associate dean worked hard to build good relationships with counselors at the community colleges. “I’d like to be able to talk to students when they’re in a community college, and we do much of that because we’re working with [community college C] all the time with their ongoing group of students.” Although the university has prepared individual curriculum guides for each major, “done in the context
of the community college curriculum,” good information was not always enough.
“What’s important about the community college counselor is that it’s a human contact,
and I still think that’s probably a lot better than the Web. Getting good information in the
hands of well-trained counselors—that’s a big deal.”

The state transfer policy has had a positive effect in improving relationships
between university C and the community colleges. “This stuff is pretty good. The more I
read it the more I think the people that put this thing together…there’s good language.
Well done. I’m surprised at it. I can go to it and get what I need, what I should be
doing.” Nevertheless, the associate dean admitted, “the different interpretations that
people put on this stuff is amazing.” The key to the policy’s effectiveness, he argued,
was the way it was operationalized at the institutional level. “You operationalize those
policy statements. And I think any institution has to do something like that. And if you
don’t, then you’re letting everybody interpret it the way they want to.” The operational
definitions of the policy then became the rules by which the institution dealt with students
in the transfer of college credits.

Yet another threat to the impact of the policy was the way the institution then
enforced the rules. According to the associate dean, when the student has “done in spirit
or in actuality what needed to be done, why not solve transfer problems amicably in the
student’s favor? And I think that’s the key thing—in the student’s favor.” But “other
four-year colleges are much more willing to enforce the rules, and I think that’s to the
detriment of the student. The rules become more important than helping the student.”
Some four-year institutions required an equivalent course description to award transfer
credit, but “I think most rational people try to solve things for the benefit of the student as long as they’re not giving away the store.”

Without insisting there was a causal relationship between the State Policy on Transfer and improvement in the transfer relationship of his institution to the community colleges, the associate dean at university C described transfer as having “changed measurably.” “When I came in ’71, I think you heard more of the horror stories, the problems of transfer. I honestly don’t hear a lot of that anymore.” In fact, the associate dean was concerned that “we see more of the floundering around taking the wrong courses at the four-year institutions.” The state transfer policy does not address transfer issues between four-year institutions. The effect of the policy has been that “there’s more structure now. Consequently you don’t see unneeded courses, and an awful lot of community colleges have pared their curriculum down quite a bit to the point where they’re offering pretty much what the four-years are going to take.” The price of an effective policy was give and take. “So here’s policy at its real ultimate. What do you buy off? What do you trade in order to have a fairly consistent way of dealing with all of the students?”

If the strength of the policy was the flexibility that it gave institutions to operationalize policy statements, its weakness also was that it allowed multiple interpretations. To solve transfer problems, “I’d put my bucks into communication—probably human communication. You’ve got to be as explicit as you possibly can in any kind of publications you put out, and you’ve got to try your damnedest to get them in the hands of the right people.”
Transfer was a significant part of the missions at both community college C and university C, and serving the under-served was an important piece of the transfer function at both institutions. Both agreed that good academic advising was critical to the transfer process and that the primary goal of transfer student programs and services was student success. Both institutions acknowledged that not all transfer issues have been resolved by current policy and practice, and that the effectiveness of the transfer policy ultimately will be determined by communication. The community college identified faculty communication about requirements related to the major as the next step for improving transfer, but the associate dean at university C chose to focus on better communication with students as a critical next step. “They will not ask questions. They get a lot of bad information from their friends, and then they mess up. I don’t know how we’re ever going to get over that problem.”

Virginia Community College D

As one of the smaller institutions in the community college system, college D is located in a small southwest Virginia community within commuting distance to several small private and two large public four-year institutions. The college was selected for the study not only because transfer activity was among the strongest for transfer degree graduates, but also because transfer by graduates from occupational-technical programs was higher than the VCCS average. Converted from a vocational-technical school when the community college system was founded in 1966, the college added transfer programs in 1970, offering a single Associate in Arts and Sciences degree. The 1999 fall enrollment was 3,487, 22% of whom were classified as transfer degree-seeking students. One in three students were classified as OT students, and 45% were unclassified. Forty-
two percent of the students were enrolled full-time, higher by six percentage points than
the VCCS average of full-time enrolled students.

Between 1993 and 1998, one in two graduates from transfer degree programs
enrolled at a Virginia public four-year institution in the fall semester immediately
following graduation. At the same time, graduate enrollments at private institutions
dropped from six and a half percent in 1993-94 to none in 1996-97. Data on graduates
from occupational-technical degree programs show that more than one in ten students
enrolled at a public four-year institution immediately following graduation. Perhaps the
most striking statistic was that nearly half of all graduates who enrolled in public four-
year institutions came out of occupational-technical degree programs—programs not
designed for transfer.

In the context of the college's vision and mission statements in the online version
of the catalog, transfer education was included as one of "the primary avenues through
which the mission is fulfilled" and the educational needs of the community are met. In
presenting the programs of study, a clear distinction was made between the purposes of
occupational-technical and transfer degree programs. For OT degrees, the college noted
"these programs are not intended for transfer purposes, even though some four-year
colleges and universities accept some or all of the courses in these programs."

The college provided information in the catalog on the state transfer policy and
the transfer module. The policy section was introduced with the caveat that "although
community colleges typically recommend that students complete the associate degree
prior to transfer, many students choose to transfer before graduating." The courses and
requirements for completing the transfer module were clearly spelled out, yet the benefits
of completing the degree were not mentioned. A footnote in the curriculum for engineering stated that “the articulation agreement with [one of the local four-year universities] guarantees admission to the College of Engineering for all students who graduate from this program with a 3.0 GPA or higher”—a guarantee that goes beyond the benefits under the state transfer policy.

To better understand the role of transfer in the college’s mission, individual interviews were conducted on campus with three administrators recommended by the dean as knowledgeable about transfer: the division chair who oversees most of the transfer programs, the director of student services, and the coordinator for academic assessment. The respondents’ comments reflected a stronger emphasis on transfer in the campus culture than the catalog materials implied. Not only was transfer viewed as an important part of the college mission—“transfer is one of our major areas. It’s at least a third of our mission as far as FTES (full-time equivalent students) generated,” but also as a growing focus for the college. “At any given time we’ve been more OT than transfer, and yet we’re going now more transfer,” noted the director of student services.

According to the division chair, “just a few years ago, it was down around fourteen or fifteen percent, and now it’s almost double that.” In defining the transfer population, he included 21% of the students who were declared transfer majors, seven percent of the enrollment who were dual-enrolled high school students assumed to be interested in transfer, and a significant portion of unclassified students—also assumed to be university bound. “When we were originally built we never thought of ourselves as a little junior college because we evolved from a technical school, but we have become that,” commented the director of student services.
The culture of the college seemed to encourage student success regardless of major. Preparation was a key focus of student services. College counselors worked closely with secondary guidance counselors to stress with students the importance of career exploration and choosing the right courses to prepare for college technical and transfer programs. The director of student services pointed out that “we have a high percentage of students who take developmental classes here because they didn’t take the right classes in high school.”

The college’s proximity to two public four-year institutions has created a unique role for the college in serving reverse transfers and students who commute from other community colleges’ service regions. “We get called ‘Harvard on the hill’ by our local schools here! But we do get a number of students here from a number of service regions who don’t want to go to their own local community colleges because it’s not the ‘in’ thing to do, or because they have friends at [the public four-year colleges].” Also, “we have a number of students who have been to senior institutions, have not been successful and are here because they’re trying to get their GPAs up so they can go back. An interesting number of those stay here and finish the degree.” According to the division chair, “we pick up an awful lot of that kind.”

Economics also played a role in attracting reverse transfers and students from outside the college’s service region. For “a lot of students who flunk out [of the four-year college], if the money is not there and they’re paying for it themselves, it’s much more economical to come here.”

In addition to attracting students to the college, the proximity to two four-year public institutions also pulls students away before they finish the associate degree. “We
have so many that transfer before they graduate because we’re right here at the back door. I think that does make a difference in how long they stay with us.” The number of students that attended the college for purposes other than obtaining the degree also helped to explain the focus in the catalog on the transfer module rather than on the benefits of degree completion. “We, of course, would prefer that they stay here and finish the degree, but [the college] has never been one to hang onto them and advise them they have to stay here. We have always said ‘only you can determine what is best for you.’” Although one of the four-year universities “much prefers the students stay here two years and then come to them because they do better than even their students that start out with them. The other university in the area will take our students at any time. They’re much more lenient.”

Students often changed their minds about continuing their education, and “once they figure out they can do college work, whether it’s OT or transfer, then they’ll go on.” The college advised students that “if they have any vague idea that they may want to transfer, even if they’re majoring in one of our OT programs, they should work with their advisor and try to see if they can take transfer level classes.” For example, “so many of our accounting students (in the applied accounting program) would decide to go on, and they would have to repeat their accounting, so we now offer only the one that transfers.” The director of student services said of one division chair, “she encourages everyone to go for a bachelor’s degree. She has personally articulated with so many university programs that they’re just taking stuff right and left.”

When asked specifically about the state transfer policy, respondents were positive about the effects the policy has had on transfer activity. “I like it. I think it works. The
four-year schools were much more reluctant to talk to us and to compromise with us before we had the transfer policy. And I think if we did away with it we would regress to that same state again,” explained the division chair. According to the coordinator for assessment, “it provides us with some very clear guidelines” and “there are pieces that can definitely help improve communication between our school and the four-year schools.” The coordinator of student services described the advantages of the policy in less specific terms. “It’s been good in that we have tried to make students much more aware that this is something that they can expect to happen. I think as long as people understand there are gray areas and there’s the flexibility, I think we’re OK with that.”

All respondents agreed that the policy was not an absolute guarantee for students. The division chair recalled that “I can remember when the president we had was from another state and he just couldn’t believe that we didn’t have something that was a guarantee—that we didn’t have a transfer degree that you didn’t just go in as a junior and the university didn’t have much choice about it.” The assessment coordinator noted, “I think the policy has been effective. I think it would be more effective if more people on our individual campuses were more educated as to how they can use it. Even from the counseling perspective, I’m not sure that all of our counselors really know what it is.”

One key to alleviating the problems associated with transfer was making sure students had adequate resources and accurate information for making career, as well as academic, decisions. The education a student needs depends on the student’s career goals. As someone who serves a dual role as a counselor and an assessment coordinator, the coordinator spoke with understanding when she said, “students aren’t always speaking the same language that we are. Too often students come up at graduation time,
and they're getting their degree, and they're ready to transfer, only to find out that they haven't been in a transfer program. Nowhere along the line did they share with someone that they wanted to transfer.” Good advising was believed to be critical to a smooth transfer process, and “the more that we know about the student, the more we can help them to make good decisions.” Access to transfer guides and catalogs (print and web-based) was also provided along with career information to assist students in knowing “the right questions to ask” to alert counselors and advisors to their interests and needs.

The college tried to “tailor our individual courses toward [the two public four-year institutions]” to which most of their students transfer, and offered only a select number of the courses listed in the transfer module. Nevertheless, problems with the state policy were primarily course-based, resulting from individual departments at the four-year institutions making inconsistent decisions about the transferability of courses taught at the community college. But the community college also understood that that was part of the culture of the university. The division chair explained, “Because the community colleges know what our pecking orders are, if the administrators have to make a decision, faculty follow it, go with it. But at four-year institutions, they have had the concept of faculty governance for so long that all that power rests right there with that faculty member, and unless you change that mess, very few administrators are willing to jump in there and make that decision. So you basically have to convince the faculty members.” The implication was that there is nothing wrong with the policy. The problem was the way in which the policy was implemented by the faculty on the four-year campus.
One other problem noted by respondents was the difficulty they experienced in trying to get information from the four-year institutions on the academic performance of community college students. The assessment coordinator was especially sensitive to the issue of feedback. "I think the state policy provides for tracking those students all the way to graduation, and that's not what's happening. Some of the schools are doing an excellent job, and others it's like pulling teeth to get the information." One four-year institution that operates a distance learning center at each of the community colleges "doesn't treat their community students as transfer students. Other schools say this too. It's very interesting." Perhaps because students do not physically transfer to another location, the college does not see a need to report on the performance of those students.

Although the four-year colleges did not supply data with any consistency, the division chair reported that anecdotally, "we have some excellent success stories, though we have some nightmares, too, when students take courses that are not designed as transfer." And "for the most part, our students do really well. Occasionally, some that just aren't mature enough and just aren't ready or have taken on too big a family or workload may drop out for a while." Obstacles to a smooth transition to the four-year institution were not always based on the transfer of course credits. "With a lot of these students, it's a social and emotional issue—transfer shock." But "one of the major pieces that we get, not only in terms of hard data, but in terms of the anecdotal data as well, is that the more transfer classes a student completes successfully with us, the better they're going to do after they transfer."
University D is a large, comprehensive publicly supported land grant institution located near community college D in the mountains of southwest Virginia. Its mission statement assures the citizens of the Commonwealth that “its scholastic programs are accessible to all who demonstrate academic merit to gain entrance.” The university’s online transfer guide was one of the most comprehensive in the state. It included: (a) a message from the chief transfer officer, (b) the institutional policy on transfer of community college students, (c) a list of recommended courses by major and VCCS college, (d) course equivalencies for VCCS courses, and (e) a list of VCCS colleges and addresses. Those responsible for transfer credit evaluations in each of the university’s colleges were also listed with their addresses and phone numbers.

The transfer information available online reflected the state policy in guaranteeing that associate degree graduates who were admitted to the university would be classified as juniors and would have met the university’s core requirements. The caveat that students may take longer than two years to complete the degree because of prerequisites in the majors was consistent with the state policy. The transfer module was also addressed and the application of module courses to the university’s general education core was clearly defined. The caveat that module completers must be certified by the community college also was consistent with the state policy, but presented an obstacle to students from one community college because the data system currently in use there was not programmed to identify module courses on the transcript.

If the criteria for assessing a four-year college’s commitment to community college transfers were comprehensiveness of the transfer guide and adherence to the state
policy in the university's transfer policies, then clearly university D was committed to facilitating transfer from two-year institutions. Although admission was not guaranteed to associate degree graduates, "admission preferences shall be given to local transfer students who have completed an AA, AS, or AA&S" and to "completers of the VCCS transfer module as certified by the VCCS." Furthermore, "transfer students shall have the same opportunities as other native students in areas of residence and dining programs, registration, scholarships, and financial aid."

The online transfer guide included not only the institutional policy for transferring credits, but also two articulation agreements that provided even greater guarantees to community college transfers. The college of engineering and the college of agriculture and life sciences both guaranteed admissions to community college graduates who met the grade point average and course requirements stipulated in the agreement.

And finally, a relatively new resource had been added to the information available to students online—TED (a transfer equivalency database), through which the student could "click on the name of their current college, and watch while a list of transferable classes appears before their eyes." Although this database contained information for only the two-year colleges, the university had "plans to add Virginia's four-year institutions, and finally, two- and four-year schools in other states. Few other Virginia institutions provide this database service to transfer students."

Because transfer student transcripts were evaluated, and credit was awarded, by the academic dean of the student's college, a group of three associate deans, five transfer advisors/coordinators from six of the university's colleges, and a vice provost was interviewed from university D. The Chief Transfer Officer was unavailable to be
interviewed. Assuming that different interpretations of policy may be held by each of the
university’s colleges, the group was expected to more accurately reflect the ways in
which the state policy is implemented at this major university.

In discussing the transfer function in relationship to the university’s mission, the
group was in agreement that serving transfer students was an important part of the
institution’s mission. In the college of humanities and education, “25% of our new
students we get every year are transfer students, and most of them are from two-year
schools. So it’s a fairly significant portion of our student body that comes from
community colleges.” The “target is typically about 600 or so” for annual transfer
admissions at the university. “In the college of business, about 10% of our new class is
transfer students,” and in the college of agriculture and life sciences, “about 25%-35% of
our new students each fall are transfer students, and about half of them come from
community colleges.” For restricted majors, such as business and engineering, “many
more students than we are able to teach” were applying for admission, so “access and
equity” were the major issues that presented obstacles to some students.

The commitment to serving transfer students was reflected not only in the
resources available to students online, but also through other activities sponsored by the
colleges—transfer success seminars, articulation conferences, and communications with
community college students and faculty. “We write to the heads of the business
programs there and the transfer officers, and every year we send them our check sheets
and tell them anything new that’s happening. We’ve had some conferences.” But many
of these activities had met with less than an overwhelming response from the community
colleges. The college of business offered “a merit scholarship for $2,000 for the first two
semesters for a top student and we have 23 of these things. The most that we’ve given away is eight, and it just kills me.”

The major obstacle to a smooth transfer process appeared to be communication of accurate information. One of the associate deans complained that in spite of the comprehensive resources available to students and advisors online, “my experience has been that advisors at the community college aren’t aware of the transfer guide.” Another problem identified was that “many students think they want to major in something specific and it isn’t really what they thought it was.” Students did not always have a clear understanding of the range of majors that were available or the types of jobs for which they were being prepared.

But even when students read the transfer guide and felt they had a clear career goal in mind, the transfer process still was difficult when transcript evaluation was done at the level of individual departments at the university. One obstacle to consistent evaluations of transfer credit was “the transcripts we receive and evaluate usually do not say that they’ve completed an AS degree or anything.” Transcripts that do not certify completion were evaluated on a course-by-course basis and the guarantees of the state policy were not always applied.

The policy requirement that the general education core is satisfied by the associate degree often meant that students had not taken the general courses that served as prerequisites for upper-level courses in the major. “Students need to find out what the prerequisites are. They need to have done the prerequisite courses,” because “you can meet the core and not meet the specific degree requirements.” Various interpretations of the state policy by departments resulted in different outcomes for the student. “The chief
transfer officer told me that with the transfer module or with the transfer degree, we’re beholden to meet the core except for math,” presumably to ensure that the student had taken the appropriate prerequisite level of math for the major. “Our understanding is that all the core areas are met, and the only thing we do not have to meet are the prerequisites that are specific to our degree programs—like a particular science.” And from another associate dean came the admission, “we don’t waive any requirements, so if they don’t have those they have to take the courses.”

Requirements in the majors sometimes were determined as much by external accrediting bodies as by the university department. “Business colleges in general who have professional accreditation don’t have much flexibility on accepting course credit, so we try to soften the harshness of our accreditation, which says if you took intermediate accounting at the community college, even if they use the same textbook, you cannot transfer it here without taking credit by exam”—another obstacle to smooth transfer.

Not all departments applied courses in the same way to the seven general education core areas. “We’re bound by the state policy to give all parts of our university core if they’ve completed either the transfer module or the associate’s degree. We have forty-three percent of our VCCS students coming in last year where I waived the fine arts and international courses because I couldn’t in good faith take computer science and make it an international course.” But another dean argued, “I mean I never give credit for core areas six and seven if they have just the transfer module!”

Part of the problem was rooted in the different interpretations of how various courses should be applied. “One of the things that I’ve realized is that what they call humanities at the community college is not what we call humanities here.” Part of the
problem was also that different departments required different core courses to meet major requirements as well. "On the psychology it still says you have to have both semesters, but a few of our majors in our college require one semester." Unfortunately, the "students in the community college don't know that unless they've talked to us...that we'll go ahead and take it for our purposes. That's really not fair to the student."

Other departments had resolved the problem by not accepting any courses. "I don't understand how we let that entire department decide that nothing taught at the community college can come in as a philosophy course."

The problems were further complicated by the differences between the community colleges in the way even the common courses were taught. "We are still having problems—serious problems with math. This is another problem, not with the transfer policy per se, but MTH 163 and MTH 271 are vastly different at different schools, and some community colleges we like what they teach and some we don't."

And depending on the baccalaureate major, some required courses simply could not be taught at the community college. "We try to be real up front with students, especially the community college students, when they can't get those basic courses at the community college. There's no equivalent at the community college."

One department "actually put it in the transfer guide that we encourage them to come after one year. Part of it goes back to the sequence of courses that they can't get at the community college."

"See that's the dilemma" with the policy. "We would like a book that says this is what it is, but then we all have our uniqueness and specific areas and colleges and disciplines." Three of the university's colleges have attempted to resolve the problems through the use of college-wide or departmental articulation agreements. "We have
articulation agreements with all of the community colleges in the state that guarantees them admission to our college if they meet certain criteria at the community college. If they complete those courses with Cs or better and have a 2.5 overall QCA at the end of two years, and their associate's degree, they're guaranteed admission to our college as juniors.” One college’s agreement “doesn’t guarantee admissions, but it guarantees that the courses they took in essentially technical degrees fulfill forty-two credits on this campus.”

Another piece of the transfer puzzle was what has been called the “reverse transfer,” or the university student who enrolled concurrently, or subsequently, in the local community college. “We find that our students use community colleges to take courses elsewhere. In the years when you could not get public speaking as a sophomore because of class seat availability, there must have been a bus going to [community college D]. And tons of our students take courses there in the summer.” Another dean acknowledged “we’ve really tried to push the VCCS as an alternative with students who wanted to come to us and didn’t get admitted. We’ve had people apply to the two other four-year colleges in the region, but for our college those are two bad matches.” One dean expressed concern that “I talk to many students and parents who cannot get into our college, and I tell them about the community college. And they don’t know that the transfer programs are there. There’s a big need for information.”

But the bottom-line issue in transfer was student success. The state policy put pressure on the university “to say yes, that they would take that course, but no, it doesn’t prepare them for our classes.” As one dean described it, “they come here thinking they’ve got the credit for the prerequisite courses, but they don’t have the skills.” But
another dean observed, “I really have to credit the community colleges. Their students are just as well prepared as anyone else.” The college of business studied the success of their transfer students and found that “the more transfer credits that people had, the better they did.” The data were “compelling—we still have this bimodal distribution that transfer students are disproportionately represented on the suspension list and disproportionately represented on the dean’s list.”

And what had been the effect of the state policy on transfer? “I hear fewer war stories, but I don’t know that that’s a good measure or not.” One dean observed, “I think the community colleges are doing a better job because our success rate with transfer students has improved dramatically for the last ten years.” On the other hand, according to one dean, “we have not had any increase in applications, nor have we had much of an increase in the number of credit hours transferred,” but another noted that “our enrollment of transfer students about doubled after the college’s articulation agreement went into effect.” Figures posted online by the university’s institutional research office suggested that over the past six years, applications from VCCS colleges have increased by six percentage points, acceptances have increased approximately one percentage point, and the percentage of those who actually enroll at the university has remained constant at seventy-two percent.

The deans expressed the belief that many of the problems transfer students face could be alleviated by improved communication. “I think the lines of communication need to be so much more open” between community colleges and the four-year universities.” One dean suggested that the VCCS “collect the final exams and syllabi and use the grant monies to publish them, so you’d have the syllabus and the final from the
transfer courses of any of the fourteen publics that offers this course." Students also
needed better information about appropriate resources to consult. "I think the other part
of that is making sure the students know who to contact at the four-year institutions and
that the information gets out to the advisors. The check sheets are changing all the time."

University D was the primary recipient of community college Ds transfer
students, and on many transfer issues the two institutions agreed. The university deans
acknowledged community college efforts to align their course offerings with
requirements of the baccalaureate degree programs in the various colleges. Both the
university and the community college recognized that physical proximity was a factor in
both attracting students to the community college and in pushing them into transferring
before completing the associate degree. Both institutions recognized that obstacles to
transfer were often social and emotional rather than academic, but that the more courses
completed successfully at the community college, the better the student’s chances were
for success after transfer. Another common theme was the need for better connections
between transfer advising and career counseling to tie the education students need to their
career goals.

University D and community college D both acknowledged that the state transfer
policy had been an important impetus for improved communication and cooperation and
that the problems that remained centered on the transferability of specific courses. The
vice-provost at university D observed "it’s one thing for our faculty to argue in fact that a
VCCS course doesn’t cover all the material. In fact, probably the same course taught
down the hallway by another university faculty member might not cover all the material."
From our end, I think we need to look at ways that we can determine some competencies, and not always just what's on a course syllabus and seat time.”

Problems remained that could not, and may never be addressed by a state-mandated policy. As the vice-provost noted, “meetings like this help considerably. We have to keep talking to one another, trying to work these differences out. But it’s almost an impossible task to advise community college students because by their very nature, they change their minds.” And yet he observed, “we also have to encourage students to keep us accountable, because that’s a piece I saw that really helped to shape the state transfer policy.”

Virginia Community College E

College E is a small community college located in the northwest part of the state. The college is within commuting distance from one state university and two private colleges. Community college E was selected for the study to represent transfer activity typical of the system’s smaller community colleges. The fall 1999 enrollment was 2,776, 31% of which were enrolled full-time. Nearly one in three students was classified as transfer degree-seeking, compared to one in four students enrolled in occupational-technical programs. Forty-four percent of the students enrolled in fall 1999 were unclassified.

Between 1993 and 1998, the percentage of graduates from transfer programs that enrolled in a public four-year institution immediately following graduation rose from nearly 40% to 48%. The percentage of transfer program graduates enrolled in private institutions dropped during that same period from almost four percent to nearly two percent. The percent of associate degree graduates from occupational-technical programs
that enrolled in a public four-year institution was much lower than the system average of ten percent, but rose from nearly four percent in 1993-94 to slightly more than five percent in 1996-97. The percentage of graduates enrolling in private institutions declined from a high of nearly four percent to slightly under two percent in 1998. Of all graduates transferring to four-year colleges, fewer than one in five were graduates from an occupational-technical program.

The college catalog and student handbook were accessible online. Transfer was listed as one of the educational programs offered as part of the college’s mission “to anticipate and respond to the educational needs of the central [valley], ensuring that all individuals have life-long opportunities to develop their knowledge, skills, and values.” Transfer advising was included throughout the descriptions of various student services, and was tied directly to career services.

Like other small colleges in the community college system, college E offered a single transfer degree—the Associate in Arts and Sciences degree. Although “designed for students who intend to continue their studies by transferring to a senior institution,” the goal of the program was described as “provid[ing] students with a broad introduction to some of the major fields of study in the liberal arts as well as the foundation necessary for success in upper-level courses.” The degree was presented as having intrinsic value beyond its usefulness in preparing students for transfer.

A direct reference was made to the state transfer policy in the description of the transfer program, and students were advised to pick up a copy of the policy, along with information on articulation agreements, from the counseling center. The reference to the policy stated clearly that although graduates can expect to have met lower division
requirements at "participating institutions" (those that abide by the policy), "these agreements do not guarantee admission to these institutions, nor do they imply that each individual community college course will transfer." Students were further advised that waivers of general education are "dictated" by the state policy for associate degree graduates, but that not all colleges abide by the policy.

To better understand the transfer function at the college, three individual interviews were conducted on campus with a transfer faculty advisor, the coordinator of counseling services, and the college dean. The dean discussed transfer as "essential" and "highly important" in the mission of the college - "It's what we do and what we ought to be about doing." Transfer was also perceived as having "grown a lot in the last decade," but the counselor expressed concern "that although the culture of society is going toward technical education," parents see technical programs as "good for everybody's kid but my own." "Students are being told that a bachelor's degree is their ticket to success. It doesn't matter what it's in."

To slow this trend, the college emphasized career education, "telling students to pick your career first and match your education to it. Don't do it the other way around." Nevertheless, "we get about 80% of incoming high school students choosing transfer, and our retention rate is about 50% of that." The statistics show "more full-time students and more students in the transfer program" than in previous years, but according to the coordinator of counseling, "all the young people are going into transfer, and we're losing many of them in developmental [courses]."

The "culture of the valley" was described by the faculty advisor as limiting, with a number of students "coming from families where nobody's ever gone to college"
before." "We seem to be a magnet for immigrants," and "most of the students want to
stay in the valley, stay close to home." She went on to say that "lack of the basic
knowledge about why they're here and where they're going is one of the biggest
obstacles that we have to overcome"—hence, the importance the college placed on tying
transfer to career and personal counseling as well as to academic advising. "We keep
trying to encourage them to 'think out of the valley (rather than out of the box)!'"

According to the dean, "the leadership for transfer has really fallen to the
counseling center as opposed to the academic side providing the leadership." The faculty
advisor also acknowledged that "student services is well-integrated into our academic
area. You don't just work in your silo. First it bothered me, and then the more I got used
to the culture and the organization here, the more I saw this was working and serving our
students."

The integrated model was also reflected in the dean's perspective that "college is
more than that (taking courses to get a job). It should change your life and you should be
thinking about how it's changing your life while you're going through it." "VCCS
colleges should take a stronger role in the ownership of general education in the transfer
program. Rather than using a 'cafeteria model,' we should define what we are doing in
terms of an experience that connects those courses together."

Communicating this perspective to both students and the faculty was seen as a
challenge. Educating students about transfer centered on a student development course
that uses a "group instructional format" to emphasize "the transfer process rather than
transfer information." In those workshops, students were taught how to access
information online and work through published guides from the four-year institutions.
But according to the coordinator of counseling, “the hole that I’m really concerned about, and that I don’t know how to fix, is faculty advising. We have really done very little in terms of training, and we’ve imposed a faculty advising system on a very resistant faculty.” He went on to explain the problem as one of providing incentives and rewards for good faculty advising.

From the counseling perspective, the “hole” in faculty advising existed at the four-year college as well. “The four-year college faculty generally don’t know what’s going on in terms of the State Policy on Transfer,” and that makes working with faculty difficult when it comes to resolving transfer problems. The dean pointed out that “if you try to work with departments, it takes sometimes years” so “you’ve got to work with someone there who will make it happen at that institution and get results.” The college, therefore, worked through an associate provost to resolve issues.

The positive effect of the state transfer policy was defined by the dean in terms of a growing emphasis on graduation with an associate degree. “The [four-year university] has changed so much that they really emphasize graduation and that wasn’t true five or six years ago. I think that they still emphasize that they will take anybody after 30 credits,” but “we want them to stay here and graduate and make sure that they become juniors and that they’re not left behind.” And because of the emphasis on graduation, “we have not emphasized the transfer module. We publish it as required, but I don’t think any transfer students could tell you what it is or where it comes from.” The coordinator of counseling has “always had problems” with the transfer module. “I’m not sure this kind of mid-step in giving it recognition as a completed module is the best thing for students.”
The faculty advisor, whose husband taught at a nearby four-year institution, offered a different perspective on the state policy. "I think [highly selective public institutions] should be allowed some latitude to have some distinctive things going on. I wouldn’t want the state policy to make everything homogenized, but I don’t want it to be so specialized that it makes it difficult for our students to make a decision about where they might like to go and where they might fit in best."

The college’s ambivalence toward the state transfer policy rested on the interpretation of policy as guidelines that do not provide any guarantees to students. "I think the technical nature of the transfer policy is met, there’s no doubt about it, but the spirit of it may not be." Admission to certain competitive programs was particularly problematic. "They’re putting up all sorts of roadblocks for their own native students. I want that transfer students would be treated no worse or no better."

But the faculty advisor believed that transfer problems "are on the four-year school’s part," and not necessarily problems with the policy. "If there are problems, they are generally problems with the perceptions at the four-year schools. They need to be a little more open and a little less territorial and a little less conceited." The sense at the college was that four-year institutions still hold "their vision of community colleges as the stepchildren of the higher education community in Virginia. There’s still this tendency to look down on the students and to look down on the courses that they’ve taken." In the words of the faculty advisor, "we should have some kind of a state policy that makes the state schools respect what we’re doing." The point made by the others was that four-year institutions need to recognize the community college’s general education core as an "equivalent experience" rather than equivalent courses, and that
“students who complete the degree should not be subject to the peculiar requirements of
the receiving institution.”

According to the dean, although general education requirements under the policy
are waived for students holding the transfer associate degree, the “fundamental bedrock
principle” of a general education core—one that represents an equivalent experience,
would make it possible for non-completers and applied science degree graduates to avoid
retaking many general education courses should they decide to transfer. Some four-year
colleges have viewed the occupational-technical degree as a “stepping stone to a
bachelor’s degree,” but the opportunities are limited. “If we could convince four-year
colleges that the applied degree student should take additionally just those general ed
courses (in the equivalent core), not the whole transfer program,” and that they should
“waive general ed based on the additional gen ed courses they took,” that would do a
much better job of linking technical education with the bachelor’s degree. “More and
more of our AAS graduates want to transfer, and that would be a significant reform and
enhancement to the State Policy on Transfer.” Coupled with that, the dean argued that
applied degree graduates should “get at least two and a half years, if not three years” of
credit and have general education waived if they complete the additional general
education core.

Clearly, the college believed that “it’s the student’s responsibility to know things”
and to work out problems related to transfer. “The feeling is that we can’t keep up with
all the requirements, but what we can do is to show students how to help themselves to
make decisions,” argued the coordinator of counseling. The counselor and the advisor’s
role was “to interpret the information that they’ve found and to sort things out” with the
chief transfer officer when students get conflicting reports. But specific problem areas were difficult to identify because “very few students actually come back and tell us their experience with transfer.”

Students also were held accountable for doing the work required to complete the degree. With regret, the faculty advisor commented “we don’t get that many transfer students through successfully and on to another college. As long as we’re giving them the opportunity and we’re giving them a support system, it’s up to them to decide to achieve or not to achieve. If they don’t succeed when we give them ample support, then I don’t think we should be held accountable for that.”

Based primarily on anecdotal information, reports indicated that those who completed the transfer process reported very positive experiences. Institutional research data indicated that “some areas have been problematic—math and science in particular,” but one four-year college professor reported no difference in the performance of transfer and native students. “They seem as well-prepared as anybody else.” In terms of student success, the dean opined, “our greatest challenge is this. What we focus on is what happens when they go beyond us, and we define success primarily by what they do after they leave us. I think we need to think a little bit more about what they achieved while they were with us, not in terms of specific courses, but in terms of an integrated experience.”

Virginia Four-year Institution E

The online master plan and mission statement for university E expressed clearly that the “primary constituent is the student. Directly or indirectly, everything we do will center on the student’s educational experience.” University E is a selective, publicly
supported, comprehensive institution located in the northwest corner of the state. Its roots as a normal school were reflected in its commitment to “superlative teaching” and preparing students “for professional and career success and giving them an appreciation for lifelong learning and community involvement.” The university took pride in offering students both “challenge and support.”

Virginia community college students were encouraged to apply for admission, and yet cautioned that “admission is competitive.” The transfer information published online referenced the State Policy on Transfer, and unlike other four-year institutions, identified those community colleges for which the general studies degree was also considered to be covered under the terms of the state policy. Preference was given to associate degree graduates from baccalaureate-oriented programs, and students who were admitted were given junior status and lower-level general education requirements were waived. A number of caveats were described in the general policy statements. For example, credits were not awarded for D grades or for “extended learning courses unless specifically approved by the department.” Applied courses (occupational or vocational courses), courses for which the university had no comparable discipline, courses traditionally taught at the upper level but taught at the community college, and credits earned by local exam also were non-transferable.

The university’s transfer policy paralleled the state transfer policy, but the introduction to the policy referred to an agreement with the community colleges rather than to a mandated state policy. The agreement “recognizes the common goals of the university’s general education and the VCCS transfer degrees” and assured students that it “should make transferring easier.” The institution’s policy had a unique caveat not
found in other four-year institution’s transfer policies: “the associate degree must be completed prior to matriculation” and “no more than six hours of [university E] credit may be applied toward completion of an associate degree.” The policy was also clear that completion of the associate degree did not guarantee admission to the university, and that not all transfer module courses would be accepted toward general education requirements.

University E had an “interdisciplinary, sequenced program” of general education with “few direct course equivalents” in the VCCS master course file. A “package” of VCCS courses was therefore identified for each general education “cluster” to provide a set of “reasonable equivalents.” Transfer into the university’s innovative college of integrated science and technology was especially challenging because of the structure of the general education core.

The director of admissions, a former member of the state committee on transfer and Chief Transfer Officer for the institution, admitted candidly that the tone of the transfer information published in the online catalog was negative and that it read like a list of “shall nots.” Although she believed that “transfer’s a very important part of what we do and offer,” she also thought “it’s very challenging for the students. I’m not sure that we’re always as welcoming as we could be.” For example, “the first semester is so challenging getting classes because there’s literally leftovers, and I think if they can get through that first time, then they get to pre-register the next time.” Other challenges included “getting your finances lined-up—especially from the community colleges where the costs are so much more reasonable.” And “we’re dealing with still a lot of first
generation college students. We now have and are seeing more immigrant and migrant children.”

As a residential college, university E had a distinctly different culture from the community college. “Community college students are busy in different ways.” At the university, “a lot of what students do, even work-related, happen on campus.” On the other hand, “community college students go, do their school-work, take care of what they need to, and then go home. They have families, jobs—responsibilities that take them away from the campus.” As the admissions director pointed out, transfer students have to learn to adjust to a new culture. “Transfer is much, much more than articulation.”

One of the most challenging aspects of transfer was helping students understand the range of majors available and the limitations imposed on admission to popular majors. Too often transfer students “don’t necessarily choose [university E] because it’s got a major. They choose it because they like it or the day they visited it was beautiful or their friends go here or they think they know what they want.” But the majors were not always what students thought they were. For example, university E had a major in business and marketing education. “It’s an education degree—a degree for people who want to teach business.” But “the number of kids who say on their application that they want BMED because it’s business and marketing—they’re in the wrong major.” The university decided to merge academic advising and career services “because the academic advisors found that they were doing career development and career services folks found that they were doing academic advising.”

The over-enrolled major was a problem—the popular major to which the university has had to limit access because of resource issues. The barricades were
especially problematic for community college transfer students. Some programs were
much more flexible than others” in permitting increased enrollments, “but by the time
you figure out how to make it happen, the next major du jour has taken off.” And if the
student was finally admitted to the program but did not have the proper prerequisites,
“you can’t start a sequence until the fall, so it’s another year and a half before they can
get going.”

Students interested in transferring to university E were encouraged to complete
the associate degree. “This is to their advantage because without it, things aren’t going to
line up as nicely. With an associate degree that missing math class is going to go away
because you’re going to have your general education met.” The degree, however, did not
ensure that the student had the prerequisite courses for the major. Students did not
understand that although “general education’s taken care of, you still need these six
prerequisites for business—classes you could have taken at the community college.”

Part of the problem was communication between the university and community
college faculty advisors. “You’d think that in a state where there’s a public community
college system, and public four-year system, that there would be better communication
but there isn’t.” Although “we’ve worked more closely with [community college E] the
last few years because of problems students have had coming into our programs and
misunderstanding the state policy.” The problems did not always stem from bad advice.
“I think students get good information. I don’t think they understand it.” Yet, “when you
let faculty do the academic advising, and they don’t understand the State Policy on
Transfer and what it means, they may guide students the wrong way. They’re giving the
student a mixed message.”
Students had to assume their share of responsibility for misinformation as well. Some used the community college "as an avenue to do some exploration, to hold a place in time until they figure out where they're going." Or they may have decided initially to transfer to a particular public four-year college, and even when they changed their minds, that college "became their benchmark for how every other institution" interpreted the transfer policy. Students "... may not even know how to ask the right questions. Maybe we expect too much. A lot of the transfers that come to us are very traditionally aged college students. They're not the typical twenty-seven year old adult community college student." Young students particularly had to be encouraged and supported to challenge the system.

Although the associate degree provided benefits to students in terms of meeting general education requirements, transferring specific courses still presented obstacles. In the social sciences, for example, "community colleges want to teach a class in two semesters where the four-year schools are teaching it in one semester, and they're wanting the four-year school to say we'll give you six credits for a class that we give our students three credits for. Who's that benefiting? It's hurting the student." One solution offered by the director was to adopt a policy such as the one in North Carolina or Florida that mandates common course numbers and content for general education courses. "There should be true core classes where there are the same number of hours, the same lab—the same class and no one would be suspect." Or "maybe the community college could just be a little more in tune to what the four-year schools are doing. There's a lot of partnership, but there could be stronger partnership."
Just as other four-year institutions had supported the state transfer policy as a tool that improved communication between two- and four-year institutions, the admissions director from university E also thought “the policy is very valuable and was something that we absolutely needed to do. It was good when it was written in ’89 or ’91, but I think it needs to be revisited a little bit.” Again, the problems seemed to be with the transfer module. “I hate to say those words, but I think the transfer module is not doing what it was designed to do. I would say the majority of transfer students who have completed the transfer module have completed the degree.” The solution she proposed was “better liaisoning—look at the courses that are problematic.”

The important issue was not that students accumulated the right number of credits, but that students had what they needed in prerequisite skills and content. “We get students who can’t start a program because all they have is hours, but not the right courses.” In some cases, “students come in at a disadvantage because they’ve gone the easy route. Some of the academic areas might have been challenging for them and when they skip the things they don’t like, that’s showing us that there’s a weakness. Then they struggle here because they don’t have the foundation that they needed.”

University E had evidence that some community college students were not well prepared to pass the PRAXIS I exam—a test of general education skills required for licensure as a teacher in Virginia. “Their failure rate is much higher than the overall university population. We don’t know why yet, but community college students have struggled much more with passing the PRAXIS I exam.” The director surmised that courses that met the requirements for an associate degree might not have been appropriate to prepare students to pass the licensure exam.
Both community college E and university E agreed that the numbers of first generation, immigrant, and migrant transfer students were growing in the valley—students that presented challenges for academic advising and career counseling. The competitiveness and selectivity of admissions criteria and the "less than welcoming" atmosphere—both of which were acknowledged by the university director, also were reflected in the community college’s view that transfer problems were the result of the four-year college’s perceptions that community college students were inferior. Where university E expressed the opinion that community colleges should be more cognizant of what the four-year colleges are doing, community college E expressed frustration with the delays in getting information from faculty and their preference to work with the associate provost to resolve transfer issues.

One issue on which the two institutions agreed in principle was the importance of measuring student success. According to the university admissions director, "I think we’re doing OK with compliance with the state policy, and people are really on the same page, but now we just really need to look at success rate and make sure that the students are best prepared and ready to go into a four-year school." Community college E added, however, that because so few of their students actually completed the associate degree program, the evaluation should not be limited to student performance at the four-year institution, but should also include an evaluation of what students achieved at the community college in terms of a growth experience.
CHAPTER 5: ACROSS-CASE ANALYSIS AND IMPLICATIONS OF FINDINGS

Overview of Virginia’s State Policy on Transfer

The state transfer policy was intended to facilitate and improve transfer practices between community colleges and four-year institutions. Writers of Virginia’s State Policy on Transfer made clear in the document’s introduction that efficiency and effectiveness were necessary goals for the state’s higher education system to provide a well-educated citizenry. Partnerships and cooperation between institutions were the means prescribed to achieve those goals. Fair access, acceptance of credits, and equitable treatment were proffered as reasonable expectations for community college students who wish to continue their education beyond the associate degree.

The historical themes identified earlier in the brief history of transfer in Virginia—institutional autonomy, elitism, and avoiding duplication, were reflected throughout the document’s proposals and implementation measures. For example, the document acknowledged the following assumptions.

1. All capable students should have access to four years of higher education.
2. Students should be encouraged to advance as far through the educational system as they are able.
3. The institutional autonomy and diversity of Virginia colleges and universities are valuable and must be protected.
4. Students should not have to repeat coursework they have completed.
making course selections...” Students’ responsibilities for planning and seeking out information and advice were also addressed, as well as the institution’s responsibilities to monitor minority student enrollments and track transfer students’ performance.

Institutional Policy Definitions and Implementation

To create a richer context for across-case analysis, a summary follows of how each community college has defined and implemented the policy and how the four-year institution, to which most of the community college’s students transfer, has defined and implemented the policy.

Community College A.

Whether by student choice or for administrative convenience, nearly half of community college A’s students were in a transfer degree program, yet the college has experienced a decline in the number of graduates who enroll at a four-year institution following graduation. Although the staff agreed that transfer was an important part of the school’s mission, there was some sense that too many resources have been focused on the transfer function. The demand for occupational-technical programs was rising, and half of the graduates who transfer to private institutions have come out of applied rather than transfer degree programs.

One of the major frustrations expressed was the inability to get information on curricular changes and the performance of community college students at four-year colleges. Lack of data has made it difficult for the college to assess whether or not students are well prepared. At the same time, staff expressed concern that the college has done too much “hand-holding,” and that students should assume more responsibility for the decisions they make regarding career choices and course selection. Getting accurate
satisfactorily at a community college.

In the area of admissions, the policy allowed that “senior institutions have authority over admissions decisions to their institutions and to programs within their institutions.” Community college students were to be given “reasonable access” if they met the “typical admissions criteria” of the four-year institution. In the area of acceptance and application of credits, community colleges were charged with “ensuring that their programs and courses are equivalent to those offered at four-year institutions.” Senior institutions must then recognize the coursework as legitimate “once the two parties have determined equivalency.”

Although graduates of VCCS transfer degree programs “should be considered to have met lower-division general education requirements,” and “considered to have attained junior standing,” the policy adds the caveat that transfer students may take “longer than two years to complete the baccalaureate because of prerequisites in the major or other requirements or circumstances.” Students who complete the transfer module should get 35 credits applied toward meeting general education requirements, but again, additional courses might be required.

The state policy acknowledged the importance of good communication between faculty and counselors at community colleges and their counterparts at four-year institutions. Trained advisors and administrative support were also acknowledged as key factors in good communication. Articulation agreements were encouraged in the case of professional or technical programs where more specific requirements must be met. The role of the state in transmitting information was also defined as “establish[ing] an online electronic database in an interactive format that assists prospective transfer students in

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making course selections…” Students’ responsibilities for planning and seeking out information and advice were also addressed, as well as the institution’s responsibilities to monitor minority student enrollments and track transfer students’ performance.

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To create a richer context for across-case analysis, a summary follows of how each community college has defined and implemented the policy and how the four-year institution, to which most of the community college’s students transfer, has defined and implemented the policy.

Community College A.

Whether by student choice or for administrative convenience, nearly half of community college A’s students were in a transfer degree program, yet the college has experienced a decline in the number of graduates who enroll at a four-year institution following graduation. Although the staff agreed that transfer was an important part of the school’s mission, there was some sense that too many resources have been focused on the transfer function. The demand for occupational-technical programs was rising, and half of the graduates who transfer to private institutions have come out of applied rather than transfer degree programs.

One of the major frustrations expressed was the inability to get information on curricular changes and the performance of community college students at four-year colleges. Lack of data has made it difficult for the college to assess whether or not students are well prepared. At the same time, staff expressed concern that the college has done too much “hand-holding,” and that students should assume more responsibility for the decisions they make regarding career choices and course selection. Getting accurate
information into the transfer center and into the hands of advisors was sometimes difficult, and career counseling and academic advising have not been well coordinated.

Faculty advisors appeared to know very little about the state policy. The best protection for the student in terms of acceptance and application of credits has been the signed "two-plus-two" agreements, which were interpreted as representing a contract between the student and the four-year institution. According to the staff, the state does not exert enough clout to make the senior colleges comply with the state policy. Even though preference in admissions was supposed to be given to degree holders, the competition for students between the region's four-year institutions has had the effect of pulling students away before they graduate with the associate degree. The state policy has served as nothing more than a "skeleton" that is fitted to each senior institution, and no two four-year colleges have interpreted the policy in the same way. According to community college A, the policy should be a guarantee for students, but it has lost most of its potency. The transfer module was viewed as particularly ineffective because in the college's experience, course equivalencies were determined arbitrarily.

The weakness of the policy has been attributed to the fact that in spite of a statewide policy, colleges have continued to operate on the basis of regional agreements that offer the student better guarantees. Relationships with local four-year institutions were good because of the two-plus-two agreements, but out of the local area, determining course equivalencies has been a problem. The college dean suggested that transfer should be based on achievement of "concepts and competencies," and not on credits and seat time.
Clearly, community college A has defined the state policy in terms of what should happen and what is allowed, rather than what the policy can and will do for students. According to college staff, students need to have something definite—"one stop shopping" for information on requirements at all four-year institutions. But their experience has been that institutions always have had the option to accept or not to accept a course, and the state does not provide any control over what the receiving institution will do.

Four-year Institution A.

Historically, the majority of students at four-year institution A have come from community colleges, but with the addition of residence halls to this commuter campus, an effort has been made to increase selectivity in admissions and recruit more traditional first-time freshmen. Nevertheless, transfer was still viewed as an important part of the institutional mission.

The college has made every effort to accommodate the transfer student and maintain flexibility in the way courses are applied to meeting general education requirements. If a course met a humanities requirement at the sending institution, it fulfilled the same requirement at four-year institution A. Institutional policy decisions about the acceptance and applicability of credits were made by the faculty, and transcript evaluations were done in the admissions office to maintain a degree of consistency. A state mandate to decrease the number of credits required for a baccalaureate degree prompted changes to shorten the general education core, and community college students found that many of their general education courses were transferring as excess electives.
Although the transfer guide published online was a key piece of information used by students to make course selections and guide decisions about when to transfer, the most efficient transfer mechanism for community college students was the two-plus-two agreement. Four-year institution A has negotiated specific two-plus-two agreements with each of the regional two-year institutions, and the agreements have guaranteed that requirements would not change and that courses would be applied to advance the student toward the baccalaureate degree as long as the student maintained continuous enrollment. The agreements have also ensured equitable treatment for community college transfers in terms of registration, athletic events, and student activities.

Like community college A, four-year institution A has seen an increase in the number of two-year students transferring before completing the associate degree, or changing majors before meeting the terms of the two-plus-two agreement. In contrast to community college A’s explanation for early transfer, university A attributed early transfers to the structure of the associate degree and the fact that to finish the associate degree, students would have to complete additional courses that would not be required for the baccalaureate.

The State Policy on Transfer was viewed by the university as a set of measures to be used for problem-solving and making decisions about the transfer of credits. Allowances were made wherever it was possible to do so without jeopardizing the integrity of the curriculum, and the university followed the spirit of the policy in treating transfer students consistently and equitably. The university acknowledged only one point of departure from the rules in the state policy, and that was related to the transfer of D grades. Although the policy directed that lower-level general education requirements
should be satisfied by the associate degree, the university maintained that it was their right to set standards of performance, and D grades were not acceptable grades for transfer. Four-year institution A appeared to define the policy as policy-in-intent, interpreting their practices as meeting the spirit, if not the letter, of the state transfer policy.

Community College B.

Only one in four students at community college B were enrolled in a transfer program, and transfer data indicated the college had the lowest level of transfer activity to public institutions among the VCCS colleges. Of the graduates who did transfer to state institutions, nearly one-third came out of occupational-technical, rather than transfer degree programs.

According to respondents, not all students are capable of achieving a baccalaureate degree, but all students should have the opportunity to try. For that reason, transfer was presented as an option for all students in both transfer and occupational programs. Transfer was an important part of the institutional mission, and the college was proud of its local reputation as a "good little liberal arts college."

The college's associate degree programs have been structured to provide maximum flexibility so that students can use the transfer guides to select courses that will meet requirements at a number of four-year institutions. Good academic advising was viewed as a critical component of the transfer process, and students were encouraged to make career and transfer decisions as early as possible to ensure that advising was effective.
Proximity and economics were the two factors that had the greatest effect on transfer activity, and nearby out-of-state and private institutions were more accommodating in accepting credits and more willing to offer scholarships to students than the public colleges and universities in the region. The problems the college has had with transfer to in-state institutions have been primarily course-based. Transcripts evaluated on a course-by-course basis have resulted in arbitrary decisions on the acceptance and applicability of credits. The transfer module has been totally ineffective, so students and advisors have relied on the four-year online transfer guides for direction.

Few references were made to the state policy in discussions of transfer, but most of the colleges to which community college B’s students transfer were out-of-state and private institutions—institutions not bound by the state policy. Informants opined that the influence of the policy is declining, although it has served a purpose in laying the groundwork for negotiating articulation agreements. College staff emphasized the importance of completing the degree, or the general education “core curriculum,” and suggested that if all community college transfer degrees looked more alike, Virginia public four-year institutions might be more inclined to negotiate blanket, statewide articulation agreements.

Although community college B referred to the state policy as a mandate and the transfer module as a guide, transfer policy was more likely to be defined in terms of negotiated agreements. The state policy was seen as providing the “energy” and “footing” for articulation, or a document that provided the impetus for developing articulation agreements with private institutions. When asked about provisions of the state policy, informants responded that in their experience the associate degree takes
precedence over a few courses. The college’s understanding of the policy appeared to be constructed on the basis of experience in dealing with the various four-year institutions rather than on the guidelines set down in the policy itself.

Community College C.

Community college C viewed transfer as a significant part of its mission, particularly as it related to serving the educational needs of the under served student population in the surrounding urban area. Yet, only one in five students at this large, multi-campus institution were enrolled in a transfer program, and nearly half of its students were unclassified. Yet transfer data showed a strong history and growth of transfer activity by graduates.

Effective communication was a cornerstone of transfer processes at the college, and staff stressed the importance of advisors being familiar with four-year requirements and maintaining lines of communication with faculty at the four-year institutions. With this focus on accurate information, it was not surprising that one of the college’s major frustrations was the lack of data available on transfer student performance at the four-year colleges. Good academic advising was predicated on the assumption of good information, and the goal of advising at the college was clearly student success. But the limited data that were available showed that the more credits completed successfully at the community college, the greater the student’s chances for success at the four-year institution.

Private institutions were more likely to accept graduates of the college’s occupational-technical programs, yet even with the public institutions the college believed that articulation agreements were more effective than the state policy in
facilitating transfer. Adoption of the state policy did, however, highlight the importance of transfer and helped the college to establish connections with the senior institutions.

Acceptance of the general education core has not been problematic for community college C’s students. The major obstacle to transfer has been meeting the lower level prerequisites for the majors. If not carefully planned out or articulated, all credits from degree programs, although accepted, might apply only to general electives that do little to advance the student toward the baccalaureate degree.

Although the college believed that articulation agreements provided a better guarantee for students than adherence to the state policy, staff did not view the policy as ineffective. Informants defined the policy in positive terms of its intent: (a) to ensure efficient use of the commonwealth’s resources; (b) to facilitate smoother transfer; (c) to encourage degree completion; (d) to establish connections between institutions, and (e) to provide a backdrop for developing articulation agreements. The key words in defining policy-in-intention are “can” and “will,” and the college described the policy in terms of rules. For example, courses will transfer because the policy is a contractual agreement, and general education requirements will be fulfilled because it is a mandate. The ultimate goal of the state policy was defined as making it possible for students to get the most out of their education with the least amount of difficulty.

**Four-year Institution C.**

Over the past ten years, community college C and four-year institution C have forged a strong relationship of collaboration and cooperation to meet the educational needs of the urban population they serve. Transfer was such a key part of the university’s mission that the dean said it was presumed, if not expressly stated. The institution’s
liberal admissions policies, its diverse student population, a welcoming climate for
commuters, and proximity to community college C made it a popular transfer institution
for community college C's students.

Believing that it was important to get accurate information to the right people, the
university provided both online and in print, comprehensive transfer guides targeted at
different populations. Bridges of communication have been built and faculty to faculty
contacts between the university and the community college were frequent, either to
discuss curricular changes or to resolve transfer issues. Because transcript evaluations
were done at the school or department levels, various interpretations could have been
made of the policies and practices for awarding and applying credits. But the importance
placed on human communication between the parties involved frequently resulted in
transfer problems being resolved in the student's favor. A guide that operationalized the
state policy in terms of institutional policy and procedures was developed for faculty
advisors to maintain a level of consistency in the transcript evaluation process. An
attempt also was made to encourage following the spirit of the policy, if not the letter of
the policy rules.

The university recognized that trade-offs were necessary when interpreting the
state policy to ensure that students get equitable and fair treatment, and that institutional
rules should not become more important than student success. Transfer from other four-
year colleges and internal transfer from the university's owns school of medicine seemed
to be a greater challenge to undergraduate admissions than community college transfers.
The state policy appeared to have been interpreted as policy-in-intention—a set of rules
or flexible guidelines for problem solving. The associate dean also reported that fewer
transfer horror stories have been heard because community colleges have imposed more structure on their associate degrees and pared down the curriculum to offer more traditional transfer courses—goals of the state policy.

Community College D

Community college D considered transfer an option for all students, whether they were in an occupational-technical or transfer degree program, or pursuing courses as an unclassified student. Nearly 80% of the students were either unclassified or enrolled in non-transfer programs, yet community college D demonstrated the highest level of transfer activity in the state for graduates with occupational technical degrees.

Already considered a major part of its mission, transfer enrollments were growing. The college explained the growth as a result of a high level of reverse transfers and out-of-region enrollments—students who began their studies at a four-year institution and transferred to community college D, or students whose permanent address was outside the college’s service region, but who enrolled at the college to be close to the local four-year public institutions.

Because of the benefits of graduation outlined in the state policy, completion of the degree was recommended to students, but students were also encouraged to explore options, with the result being that many students changed their minds about their educational goals. Proximity to two public four-year institutions has had a “push-pull” effect on student enrollments, drawing students to the area to prepare for transfer, and at the same time, pulling students to the four-year institutions before they complete the degree. Community college D is a small college in a rural area, and the social and emotional aspects of transfer to a large, residential campus were sometimes a greater
challenge than the academics. The advising links to the community college have
frequently been maintained even after students had transferred.

The college credited the state transfer policy with providing the impetus for better
communication with the four-year institutions, but the transferability of specific courses
remained problematic. The college has relied heavily on the transfer module to advise
students, and has attempted to align its course offerings with requirements at the local
four-year universities. The institutional research office at the community college has
routinely provided a significant amount of data and information for academic decision­
making, but one of the frustrations expressed was the lack of data from four-year schools
on the acceptance and application of credits and the performance of transfer students.

Definitions of the state transfer policy were mixed. Although there was some
evidence that the policy provided clear guidelines and served as a document for problem
solving, discussions about the policy focused on expectations the college had for how the
policy should work, rather than how it can or will work. According to the college, the
policy helped, but it was not a guarantee. It provided for tracking students to graduation,
but that has not happened. According to those interviewed, courses should transfer, but
there were gray areas and a lot of flexibility in the way colleges applied credits. The one
consistent theme from the informants was that the policy has made the four-year
institutions more willing to talk to community colleges.

Four-year Institution D.

Transfer students comprised from 10% to 35% of the new student enrollments at
four-year institution D—a large, public land-grant institution located just a few miles
from community college D. The university has used the technology of the internet to
communicate transfer information, and the online transfer guide was not only comprehensive, but also interactive, to assist students and advisors in determining course equivalencies for the various college and majors within the university.

Evaluation of transfer credits was done at both the college and at the department levels, and it appeared that there were as many interpretations of how courses should be applied to the university core requirements as there were transcript evaluators. Three common concerns about community college transfers were expressed by informants: (a) the lack of understanding of the types of jobs for which students are prepared by the various majors, (b) the lack of appropriate prerequisites for the upper-level courses in the majors, and (c) issues related to access and equity in admission to over-enrolled and restricted admissions programs. Although vast amounts of information were available online to assist students and advisors, poor advising and the need for better communication between the institutions were identified as a serious problem.

The most significant issue to the informants was the pressure that the state policy put on colleges to accept community college courses that do not prepare students adequately for upper-level courses in the major. Not all community colleges taught the appropriate courses, and not all taught the same content when they did teach the same courses. Two of the university’s colleges had resolved the issue through specific articulation agreements, but others were concerned that transfer students were out of sequence transferring into their programs, making it highly unlikely that students would be able to graduate in two or three years.

No significant increase in applications or number of credit hours accepted has occurred since the adoption of the state policy, but the articulation agreements were
credited with doubling transfer enrollments in the colleges that had them. The consensus of the informants was that the state transfer policy was a set of rules that they were bound to follow, yet clearly exceptions to the rules were being made by individual colleges. Words such as “legal,” “beholden,” “bound,” and “required” were used to describe their obligations, but many were surprised at the number of different interpretations they heard of what it meant to follow the rules. In spite of the problems, the sense was that as a result of the policy, the informants were hearing fewer war stories and seeing evidence that community colleges were doing a better job of advising and aligning their curricula with the institution’s requirements.

**Community College E.** Transfer was an essential part of community college E’s mission and nearly one-third of the students were enrolled in a transfer degree program. Transfer was viewed as an option for all students regardless of program, but only one-fourth of the students were enrolled in a non-transfer program. The relatively low percentage of occupational-technical students helped to explain why transfer activity of OT students was far below the VCCS average. As a small, rural college in northwest Virginia, community college E still attracted first generation college students, and the immigrant and migrant populations at the college were growing. Transfer enrollments were on the rise, particularly with recent high schools graduates, but transfer activity was typical of most VCCS colleges.

A unique feature of the college’s organizational structure was that transfer advising was housed in the counseling center rather than in an academic department. Academic and career counseling were closely linked, and students were advised to pick a career first and then a major. In communicating transfer information, the focus was on
group advising rather than individual counseling. Faculty advising was characterized by the informants as weak, and the college staff chose to work through administrators at the four-year institutions to discuss transfer issues because their experience working with four-year faculty was that the time it took to resolve transfer problems was too long.

Providing a general education experience was viewed by the college as more important than preparing students for transfer. The integrated experience was valued more than the content of courses in a traditional distribution model of general education, but informants reported that few students actually completed the two-year degree. The college argued that four-year colleges should accept a general education block of courses for graduates of both occupational-technical and transfer programs, without a course-by-course evaluation of credits.

Proximity was a strong factor in determining where students transferred, and the majority of students elected to go to university E nearby. Relationships between the two institutions were improving, but the transfer information communicated by the community college to its students warned that although state policy “dictates” waivers of general education, guidelines do not provide any guarantees that four-year colleges will abide by the policy. Students were advised that four-year colleges may be technically in compliance, but the community college viewed their implementation practices as violating the spirit of the state policy. In defining the policy as policy-in-experience, the college viewed the policy as less than effective.

Four-year institution E.

According to the university’s online transfer guide, transfer students were encouraged to apply, but the guide also cautioned students that admissions to the
university were selective and competitive. As a residential, liberal arts college in the valley, university E acknowledged that the culture was quite different from that of the community colleges, and that the campus was not as welcoming as it could be to community college transfers. Although transfer information was readily available on the Web, a number of caveats indicated that requirements were highly structured and that institutional policies would not be waived. Technically in compliance with the proposals outlined in the state policy, the university operationalized the policy to conform to its institutional practices.

One of the reasons for making such adjustments appeared to be the unique interdisciplinary focus of the general education core. VCCS and university courses were difficult to equate. Another problem identified by the informant was that transfer students frequently do not have the prerequisite skills and knowledge to prepare them for upper-level courses in the majors. Many of the university’s programs were highly structured and sequential, and transfer students lacking appropriate prerequisites experienced difficulties in scheduling courses and completing degree programs in the same time frame as native students. The problem was further complicated when students did not clearly understand the relationship between specific careers and academic programs, and changes of major further delayed a student’s progress in completing the degree.

Four-year institution E interpreted the policy as a flexible agreement between two partners rather than as a set of rules or guidelines for resolving transfer problems. The informant clearly believed that the university was in compliance with the state policy, but argued that stronger partnerships are needed to facilitate transfer. The effects of the
policy have been to increase communication between the two institutions and to encourage community college students to complete the degree, but serious problems in aligning courses was seen as evidence that the policy, particularly the transfer module, was not doing what it was designed to do.

Across-case Analysis of Institutional Perspectives

Virginia’s state transfer policy was intended to be comprehensive without being prescriptive, and to protect the diversity and autonomy valued in the Commonwealth’s system of higher education. To better understand the meaning of the policy, however, this study went beyond a description of the policy’s components to examine how it has been interpreted and implemented at the institutional level at selected community colleges and four-year institutions. Results of this study suggest that through the process of implementation, Virginia’s state transfer policy is not one policy, but many.

What does the policy look like when it is defined in different ways? By overlaying Guba’s (1984) conceptual framework of policy types and definitions over the data (Figure 3), some interesting patterns seemed to emerge. Policy definitions, as well as the institution’s assessment of the effectiveness of the state transfer policy, were inferred from the text of informant’s interviews and transfer-related documents. Table 5 summarizes key phrases used by the institutions to define the transfer policy.

Institutions that discussed the policy in terms of rules and guidelines, or its usefulness in solving transfer problems, described the state policy as policy-in-intention. Phrases such as “the institution will” or “the student can (as a result of the policy),” or terms such as “required” or “bound,” suggested that the policy was intended to achieve
Table 5: Institutional Definitions of Policy Based on Guba's (1984) Policy Types

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Guba's Policy Type: Policy-In-Intention</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Institution</td>
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<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community College A</td>
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<td>Community College C</td>
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Table 5: Institutional Definitions of Policy Based on Guba’s (1984) Policy Types (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Respondent or Document</th>
<th>Respondent’s Words</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community College D</td>
<td>assessment coordinator</td>
<td>“It provides us with some very clear guidelines.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community College E</td>
<td>web-based catalog</td>
<td>“[Waivers of general education are] dictated by policy for associate degree graduates, but not all colleges abide by the policy.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four-year College B</td>
<td>web-based catalog</td>
<td>“...adheres to the state policy...students will have met lower Division general education requirements...will be classified As juniors...will be given preference.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four-year College C</td>
<td>associate dean</td>
<td>“What do you trade in order to have a fairly consistent way of dealing with all students?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four-year College D</td>
<td>online transfer document</td>
<td>“Admissions preferences shall be given to completers. Transfer Students shall have the same opportunities as other native students.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four-year College A</td>
<td>director of advising</td>
<td>“[The policy] is a problem-solver.”</td>
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Table 5: Institutional Definitions of Policy
Based on Guba's (1984) Policy Types
(continued)

Guba's Policy Type: Policy-In-Action

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
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<th>Respondent's Words</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community College A</td>
<td>dean</td>
<td>&quot;The power of the degree is that it all counts, whereas you're taking your chances on the individual courses.&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;We don't use the big stick enough to get institutions in line.&quot;</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;What kind of a guarantee is that?&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Community College B</td>
<td>director</td>
<td>&quot;[The module] is a skeleton and it works as a skeleton, but it has to be tailored to each individual school.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community College C</td>
<td>faculty advisor</td>
<td>&quot;Students find themselves in some jeopardy because although they've finished all their general ed, they then have program issues we need to work through.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community College D</td>
<td>director</td>
<td>&quot;It is something students can expect to happen.&quot;</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;There are gray areas and there's flexibility.&quot;</td>
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</table>
Table 5: Institutional Definitions of Policy
Based on Guba's (1984) Policy Types
(continued)

Guba's Policy Type: Policy-In-Action

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<th>Respondent's Words</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community College E</td>
<td>faculty advisor</td>
<td>&quot;[Selective colleges] should be allowed some latitude. I wouldn't want The state policy to make everything homogenized.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>dean</td>
<td>&quot;Students who complete the degree should not be subject to the peculiar Requirements of the receiving institution.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four-year College A</td>
<td>director</td>
<td>&quot;The state policy says that the requirement is satisfied, but you’ll still find Four-year institutions that will not transfer a D grade.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four-year College B</td>
<td>associate dean</td>
<td>&quot;Other colleges are much more willing to enforce the rules to the detriment of the student. The rules become more important than helping the student.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four-year College D</td>
<td>associate dean</td>
<td>&quot;We’re beholden to meet the core except for math.&quot;</td>
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<td>&quot;The only thing we do not have to meet are the prerequisites that are specific to our degree programs.&quot;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>&quot;We’re bound by the state policy to give all parts of our university core if they’ve completed either the transfer module or the associate’s degree.&quot;</td>
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</table>
Table 5: Institutional Definitions of Policy
Based on Guba’s (1984) Policy Types
(continued)

Guba's Policy Type: Policy-In-Action

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<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
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<th>Respondent's Words</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Four-year College E</td>
<td>Web-based catalog</td>
<td>“[The policy] should make transferring easier.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“With an associate degree that missing math class is going to go away because you’re going to have your general ed met, but you still need the these six prerequisites for business.”</td>
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Guba's Policy Type: Policy-In-Experience

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
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<th>Respondent's Words</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community College A</td>
<td>dean</td>
<td>“Four-year schools don’t all treat it in the same way.”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“It’s generally to their advantage to get the associate’s degree.”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>transfer coord.</td>
<td>“We tend to find that when you’ve done the degree, people are a lot more comfortable.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Community College B</td>
<td>counselor</td>
<td>“All schools differ in what they require.”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“The transfer module doesn’t tell a student what history course to take. The transfer guide does.”</td>
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</table>
Table 5: Institutional Definitions of Policy
Based on Guba's (1984) Policy Types
(continued)

Guba’s Policy Type: Policy-In-Experience

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<tr>
<td>Community College B</td>
<td>counselor</td>
<td>“It gives us energy and a footing for articulating.”</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>“They’ve eliminated some of our basic courses, so we’re drawing apart.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Community College C</td>
<td>transfer coord.</td>
<td>“Even though the student gets the degree here and transfers, if they have not</td>
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<td>had U.S. history, I think they would still have to take it even with the degree.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four-year College D</td>
<td>associate dean</td>
<td>“We don’t waive any requirements, so if they don’t have those they have to</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>take the course. That’s the dilemma. We would like a book that says this is what</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>it is, but then we all have our uniqueness.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
certain goals or ends. References to policy goals, guidelines, and problem-solving tactics were made most frequently by community college C and university C—two institutions that have a strong partnership and that assess the policy as being effective. Community college C also represented the highest level of transfer activity in this study.

Institutions that discussed the policy in terms such as “agreement” or practices that are “allowed” were more likely to be defining policy in experience. The state policy appeared to have less impact on the transfer practices of these institutions, and the institutions judged the policy to be less effective. Community college B, for example, described the policy in terms of what happens when the student transfers, or in terms of the effect it has had on negotiating other types of agreements. Community college B also represented the lowest level of transfer activity in the study. Four-year institution E, on the other hand, defined the state policy in terms of the institution’s transfer practices, and judged that the policy could not do what it was designed to do because of what institutions encounter with transfer students.

Most of the colleges and universities in the study defined the state policy in terms of Guba’s (1984) policy-in-intention—rules and guidelines, or in terms of policy-in-action—expectations, norms, and effects. Respondents described their understandings of the policy rules, but sometimes admitted that their decisions fell outside the guidelines because of the need to serve a higher goal of student success. Institutions also described effects in terms of what the policy does for students or what should happen because of the policy. Using these policy definitions, institutions gave the state transfer policy mixed reviews of its effectiveness, but most described some benefits of the policy, especially in the area of improved communication between institutions.
Discrete categories of policy types and definitions were difficult to infer from the college interviews, and at some institutions, respondents did not reach consensus on what the policy means. Because respondents were not asked directly to define the policy, many did not make statements from which policy definitions could be easily inferred.

For example, the Web-based catalog information at community college A refers to transfer rules (policy-in-intention) when it notes that courses will automatically transfer, or that courses will meet transfer requirements even if the student changes major. In the campus-based interviews, the registrar described the module in the policy as a "skeleton" or as a guide to discretionary action—Guba’s policy-in-intention. The college dean, however, referred to the policy in terms of sanctioned behavior or expectations that frequently do not materialize. And both the transfer coordinator and the dean described the policy in terms of the student’s experience—whatever action the college takes in evaluating a student’s transcript is assumed to be the college’s transfer policy. Nevertheless, Guba’s (1984) framework proved to be a useful tool for framing institutions’ interpretations of Virginia’s transfer policy and for making across-institution comparisons.

Relationship of Results to Previous Research

In the absence of research on the effectiveness of state transfer and articulation policies in achieving policy goals, this study was intended to contribute to a knowledge base on the effects of state policy at the institutional level. To understand policy effects, a case study methodology was used to understand how Virginia’s State Policy on Transfer has been interpreted and implemented on five two-year and four four-year college campuses throughout the state.
As noted in the literature search, a plethora of quantitative studies have focused on transfer rates, transfer student characteristics, and transfer student success, but they have contributed little to an understanding of the effects of state policy on transfer activity. In this study, a number of themes emerged that lend support to many of the findings of previous studies cited in the literature review. Table 6 summarizes typical responses found in this study concerning the following issues.

1. Community colleges do not negotiate on an equal basis in the articulation process (Barry and Barry, 1992; Dziech and Vilter, 1992; Prager, 1994).

2. The majority of community college transfers enroll at nearby four-year institutions (Bender, 1990; Callan, 1997).

3. Transfer effectiveness is related to the extent that transfer is a high priority in the mission of the institution (Berman, et.al., 1990).

4. The most effective agreements include specific courses that are required for students to have a reasonable assurance of success in upper-level courses (Knoell, 1990).

5. Systematic collection, analysis, and dissemination of transfer information is not a priority at the state level (Odem, 1990).

6. Implementation is affected by perceptions of the policy’s importance, the dissemination of information to support the policy, how the policy is communicated, and whether or not incentives are offered to comply with policy (Greer, 1986).

7. More students are transferring without the degree or with a vocational degree (Barkely, 1993).
Table 6: Summary of Major Themes Related to Previous Research

Theme 1: Community colleges do not negotiate on an equal basis in the articulation process.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Community College A  | dean              | "When most (community college) faculty see the courses are having difficulty transferring, they respond and make adjustments to the curriculum."
|                      |                   | "There is a struggle going on between what the four-year colleges want and what people here think a liberal arts degree should be." |
| Community College B  | counselor         | "[Four-year colleges] have eliminated some of our basic courses, so we’re drawing apart."                                                   |
| Community College C  | faculty advisor   | "Our curriculum is not the be-all, end-all"                                                                                             |
|                      | director          | "The perception was that math at the community college was quite diluted."                                                             |
| Community College D  | division chair    | "Four-year schools were much more reluctant to talk to us and to compromise before we had the transfer policy."                           |
|                      |                   | "The college tailors our individual courses toward the public four-year institutions."                                                  |
Table 6: Summary of Major Themes Related to Previous Research (continued)

Theme 1: Community colleges do not negotiate on an equal basis in the articulation process.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community College D</td>
<td>division chair</td>
<td>&quot;They have had the concept of faculty governance for so long that all the power rests right there with that faculty member.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community College E</td>
<td>counselor</td>
<td>&quot;VCCS colleges should take a stronger role in the ownership of general education in the transfer program.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>faculty advisor</td>
<td>&quot;Their vision of community colleges as the stepchildren of the higher education community... a tendency to look down on the students and the courses.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four-year College A</td>
<td>director</td>
<td>&quot;Where we can help the student out without jeopardizing the curriculum or prerequisites, that is done.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four-year College C</td>
<td>associate dean</td>
<td>&quot;Community colleges have pared their curriculum down quite a bit to the point where they're offering pretty much what the four-years are going to take.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four-year College D</td>
<td>associate dean</td>
<td>&quot;I don't understand how we let that entire department decide that nothing taught at the community college can come in as a philosophy course.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;Some community colleges we like what they teach and some we don't.&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6: Summary of Major Themes Related to Previous Research (continued)

Theme 1: Community colleges do not negotiate on an equal basis in the articulation process.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Institution</th>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Words</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Four-year College D</td>
<td>associate dean</td>
<td>&quot;They can’t get those basic courses at the community college. There’s no equivalent at the community college.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four-year College D</td>
<td>associate dean</td>
<td>&quot;Our faculty argue the fact that a VCCS course doesn’t cover all the material... in fact the same course taught down the hall might not cover all the same material.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four-year College E</td>
<td>director</td>
<td>&quot;[General education] is an interdisciplinary, sequenced program with few direct [VCCS] course equivalents.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;If community colleges could just be a little more in tune to what the four-year schools are doing there could be stronger partnership.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Theme 2: The majority of community college transfers enroll at nearby four-year institutions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community College A</td>
<td>dean</td>
<td>&quot;The local four-year colleges are taking students earlier. There’s a lot of competition.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6: Summary of Major Themes Related to Previous Research (continued)

**Theme 2: The majority of community college transfers enroll at nearby four-year institutions.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community College B</td>
<td>transfer coord.</td>
<td>&quot;There are a wealth of opportunities around here.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>[What's important] are the articulation agreements that we have with the schools that are close at hand.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;To pick up and move would mean a loss of job.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community College D</td>
<td>coord. counseling</td>
<td>&quot;We have so many that transfer before they graduate because we're right here at the back door.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;The other university in the area will take our students any time.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community College E</td>
<td>faculty advisor</td>
<td>&quot;Most of the students want to stay close to home.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four-year College A</td>
<td>director</td>
<td>[Our mission has changed] from an institution in the community without residence halls [where the majority of students were transfers from the community colleges].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four-year College C</td>
<td>associate dean</td>
<td>&quot;We're working with [community college C] all the time with their ongoing group of students.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four-year College D</td>
<td>associate dean</td>
<td>&quot;There must have been a bus going to [community college D]. Tons of our students take courses there in the summer.&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6: Summary of Major Themes Related to Previous Research
(continued)

Theme 2: The majority of community college transfers enroll at nearby four-year institutions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Four-year College E</td>
<td>director</td>
<td>“We’ve worked more closely with [community college E] the last few years.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community College A</td>
<td>transfer coord.</td>
<td>“[Transfer] is a large percentage, not more than 50%.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>director</td>
<td>“Availability of transfer programs I think helps us with recruitment. Forty percent are in declared transfer programs.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>dean</td>
<td>“Transfer programs become dumping grounds [for undecided students].”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community College B</td>
<td>Web-based catalog</td>
<td>“[A goal] to offer the student a widely accepted program of general preparation for upper division work.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community College B</td>
<td>Web-based catalog</td>
<td>“A growing number of colleges and universities are offering bachelor degree programs built upon the community college AAS degree.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community College B</td>
<td>counselor</td>
<td>“[The transfer program] proves that we are an institution that gives a quality education.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6: Summary of Major Themes Related to Previous Research
(continued)

Theme 2: The majority of community college transfers enroll at nearby four-year institutions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>division chair</td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;The college has a reputation as a good little liberal arts college because we have a large number of students who come to us for the core [transfer] curriculum.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community College C</td>
<td>faculty advisor</td>
<td>&quot;The college takes a very strong view on transfer.&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Theme 3: Transfer effectiveness is related to the extent that transfer is a high priority in the mission of the institution.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community College C</td>
<td>director</td>
<td>&quot;Transfer is a very significant part of our mission.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community College C</td>
<td>transfer coord.</td>
<td>&quot;It's in the college's mission statement that we need to increase the transfer rates.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community College D</td>
<td>Web-based catalog</td>
<td>&quot;Transfer education is one of the primary avenues through which the mission is fulfilled.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>division chair</td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;Transfer is one of our major areas; it's at least a third of our mission.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>coord. counseling</td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;When we were originally built we never thought of ourselves as a little junior college, but we've become that.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community College E</td>
<td>dean</td>
<td>&quot;It's what we do and what we ought to be about doing.&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6: Summary of Major Themes Related to Previous Research
(continued)

Theme 3: Transfer effectiveness is related to the extent that transfer is a high priority in the mission of the institution.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Four-year College A</td>
<td>director</td>
<td>“The mission of the institution in the last five to six years has changed... transfer students are no longer the majority.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four-year College C</td>
<td>associate dean</td>
<td>“Welcoming transfer students has always been a part of that mission and I’ve never known it to be any different.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four-year College D</td>
<td>associate dean</td>
<td>“It’s a fairly significant portion of our student body that comes from community colleges.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four-year College E</td>
<td>director</td>
<td>“Transfer’s a very important part of what we do and offer.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Theme 4: The most effective agreements include specific courses that are required for students to have a reasonable assurance of success in upper-level courses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community College A</td>
<td>Web-based catalog</td>
<td>“Students are advised to consult with their two-plus-two articulation agreement”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community College A</td>
<td>faculty advisor</td>
<td>“Straight-in transfer from our two-year program into a four-year program in specific departments is pretty straightforward.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>coord. transfer</td>
<td>“If students change their minds, the agreement is not binding on them.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Theme 4: The most effective agreements include specific courses that are required for students to have a reasonable assurance of success in upper-level courses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community College A</td>
<td>faculty advisor</td>
<td>“The agreement has been made between the officials of the two schools.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community College B</td>
<td>counselor</td>
<td>“The transfer module doesn’t tell a student what history course to take. The transfer guide does.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>division chair</td>
<td>“It pays off for our students to complete the associate degree because of the articulation agreements.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community College C</td>
<td>Web-based catalog</td>
<td>“Such agreements guarantee that the student with the associate degree has complete transferability of all credits.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community College D</td>
<td>Web-based catalog</td>
<td>“The articulation agreement with [four-year college D] guarantees admission to the college of engineering for all students who graduate from this program with a 3.0 GPA or higher.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four-year College A</td>
<td>director</td>
<td>“Articulation agreements and the state policy on transfer drive many of the decisions for community college students.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four-year College D</td>
<td>associate dean</td>
<td>“We have articulation agreements with all of the community colleges.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>associate dean</td>
<td>“Our enrollment of transfer students about doubled after the college’s articulation agreement.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 6: Summary of Major Themes Related to Previous Research (continued)

**Theme 5: Systematic collection, analysis, and dissemination of transfer information are not a priority at the state level.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community College A</td>
<td>transfer coord.</td>
<td>“I have been told that students do well.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>director</td>
<td>“[Four-year colleges] gave us some information back.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community College C</td>
<td>director</td>
<td>“It’s been a couple of years since I’ve seen any kind of data”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>faculty advisor</td>
<td>“Students tell us that we’ve done a great job.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community College D</td>
<td>assessment coord.</td>
<td>“I think the state policy provides for tracking those students all the way to graduation, and that’s not what’s happening. It’s like pulling teeth to get the information.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community College E</td>
<td>counselor</td>
<td>“Very few students actually come back and tell us their experience with transfer.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four-year College D</td>
<td>associate dean</td>
<td>“I’ve heard fewer war stories, but I don’t know that that’s a good measure or not.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6: Summary of Major Themes Related to Previous Research
(continued)

Theme 6: Implementation and policy effectiveness is affected by perceptions of the policy's importance, the dissemination of information to support the policy, how the policy is communicated, and whether or not incentives are offered to comply with the policy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community College A</td>
<td>dean</td>
<td>“I like the idea of such a document, but it’s not worth the paper it’s printed on. And for reasons of the four-year schools don’t treat it in the same way.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“Some four-year colleges want to bicker with you about which literature class you’re taking.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community College A</td>
<td>dean</td>
<td>“The power of the degree is that it all counts, whereas you’re taking your chances on the individual courses.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“The real problem with the state policy is we’re trying to make a document that’s going to apply statewide and yet we’ve agreed that all fourteen public four-year institutions can do things totally different from one another.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>director</td>
<td>“The biggest challenge is figuring out exactly which courses will make the most efficient transfer package.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“The transfer module never has struck me as something that particularly worked or was all that useful.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“The policy has lost some of its potency. It could use a little kick in the pants to get us back to having it at the tip of everybody’s tongues.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6: Summary of Major Themes Related to Previous Research
(continued)

Theme 6: Implementation and policy effectiveness is affected by perceptions of the policy’s importance, the dissemination of information to support the policy, how the policy is communicated, and whether or not incentives are offered to comply with the policy.

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<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Words</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community College B</td>
<td>transfer coord.</td>
<td>“I see this kind of as frustration more than problems between the four-year institutions and us.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“There are times students will misunderstand, thinking they’re in a four-year degree program and they’re not.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community College A</td>
<td>faculty advisor</td>
<td>“I don’t think anybody can quite get a lasso around all the information.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“Transfer information is fragmented and not widely distributed to advisors.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“The advisor might not have known of something a four-year college did to change the requirement and the student might have taken extra courses they didn’t need—or worse, they haven’t taken courses that they did need.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“I don’t know much about the policy.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“I don’t know what protection they have when they execute course substitutions.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community College B</td>
<td>counselor</td>
<td>“Throw the transfer module out the window.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“The policy gives us energy and a footing for articulating.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6: Summary of Major Themes Related to Previous Research
(continued)

Theme 6: Implementation and policy effectiveness is affected by perceptions of the policy’s importance, the dissemination of information to support the policy, how the policy is communicated, and whether or not incentives are offered to comply with the policy.

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<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Words</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community College B</td>
<td>counselor</td>
<td>“Some advisors do a better job than others.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community College C</td>
<td>faculty advisor</td>
<td>“Many of our faculty advisors don’t want to spend the time and the energy to really do a good job.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community College C</td>
<td>director</td>
<td>“If we leave it up to self-advised students or faculty who are not in the know, that student is going to be ill-prepared.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community College D</td>
<td>assessment coord.</td>
<td>“I think it would be more effective if more people were more educated as to how they can use it.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“I’m not sure that all of our counselors really know what it is.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“Students aren’t always speaking the same language that we are.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community College E</td>
<td>dean</td>
<td>“The technical nature of the transfer policy is met, but the spirit of it may not be.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>counselor</td>
<td>“The hole I don’t know how to fix is faculty advising. We’ve really done very little training and we’ve imposed a faculty advising system on a very resistant faculty.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6: Summary of Major Themes Related to Previous Research
(continued)

Theme 6: Implementation and policy effectiveness is affected by perceptions of the policy’s importance, the dissemination of information to support the policy, how the policy is communicated, and whether or not incentives are offered to comply with the policy.

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<th>Respondent</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community College E</td>
<td>faculty advisor</td>
<td>“We publish the transfer module, but I don’t think any transfer students could tell you what it is or where it comes from.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four-year College A</td>
<td>director</td>
<td>“The university has a general education requirement of 51 semester hours. The associate of arts is at 63. It’s 10 credits more than what a native student would do.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“Students walk away from the associate degree because there are hours required in the associate degree they know they will not need.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“The biggest challenge was to help students understand the difference between an applied science degree and a transferable degree program.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four-year College C</td>
<td>associate dean</td>
<td>“This stuff is pretty good. Well done. But the different interpretations that people put on this stuff is amazing.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“When I came in ’71, I think you heard more of the horror stories. I honestly don’t hear a lot of that anymore. We see more of the floundering around taking the wrong courses at the four-year institutions.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“Getting good information in the hands of well-trained counselors—that’s a big deal.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6: Summary of Major Themes Related to Previous Research
(continued)

Theme 6: Implementation and policy effectiveness is affected by perceptions of the policy's importance, the dissemination of information to support the policy, how the policy is communicated, and whether or not incentives are offered to comply with the policy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Four-year College C</td>
<td>associate dean</td>
<td>“You’ve got to be as explicit as you possibly can in any kind of publication you put out, and you’ve got to try your damnedest to get them in the hands of the right people.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“Students will not ask questions. They get a lot of bad information from friends, and then they mess up. I don’t know how we’re ever going to get over that problem.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four-year College D</td>
<td>associate dean</td>
<td>“I hear fewer war stories, but I don’t know that that’s a good measure or not.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“My experience has been that advisors at the community college aren’t aware of the transfer guide.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four-year College D</td>
<td>associate dean</td>
<td>“Students need to find out what the prerequisites are. You can meet the core and not meet the specific degree requirements.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“Students in the community college don’t know that unless they’ve talked to us. That’s really not fair to the student.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“Many students and parents don’t know that the transfer programs are there. There’s a big need for information.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6: Summary of Major Themes Related to Previous Research
(continued)

Theme 6: Implementation and policy effectiveness is affected by perceptions of the policy’s importance, the dissemination of information to support the policy, how the policy is communicated, and whether or not incentives are offered to comply with the policy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>associate dean</td>
<td>Four-year College E director</td>
<td>“The lines of communication need to be so much more open. Make sure students know who to contact and that the information gets out to advisors.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“We have to keep talking to one another, trying to work these differences out.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“Our success rates with transfer students has improved dramatically for the last ten years.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Four-year College E director</td>
<td>“There should be true core classes where there are the same number of hours, the same class, and no one would be suspect.”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“It was good when it was written but it needs to be revisited. The transfer module is not doing what it was designed to do.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“You’d think there would be better communication but there isn’t.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“When faculty don’t understand the state policy on transfer and what it means, they may guide students the wrong way.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6: Summary of Major Themes Related to Previous Research
(continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community College A</td>
<td>director</td>
<td>“Students are saying ‘I’m going to transfer before I get my degree because there are some courses in the degree that aren’t appropriate to the institution where I’m going.’”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community College A</td>
<td>dean</td>
<td>“There’s a lot of competition. People don’t have to wait to have a degree finished. They can go early.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community College B</td>
<td>enroll. speci.</td>
<td>“We have more and more of our students coming out of our applied degrees who transfer.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community College C</td>
<td>director</td>
<td>“Students were coming in at a point in their non-transfer curriculum and saying now I want to transfer.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community College D</td>
<td>coord. counsel.</td>
<td>“So many of our applied accounting students decide to go on.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>assess. coord.</td>
<td>“[The division chair] encourages everyone to go for a bachelor’s degree. She has personally articulated with so many university programs that they’re taking applied courses right and left.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“The college has never been one to hang onto students and advise them to stay.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“Once they figure out they can do college work, whether it’s OT or transfer, they’ll go on.”</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Table 6: Summary of Major Themes Related to Previous Research (continued)

Theme 7: More students are transferring without the degree or with an occupational/technical degree.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Words</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community College E</td>
<td>faculty advisor</td>
<td>&quot;We don't get that many transfer students through.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>coord. counsel.</td>
<td>&quot;More and more of our AAS graduates want to transfer.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four-year College A</td>
<td>director</td>
<td>&quot;I hear more students talk about walking away from the associate degree.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four-year College D</td>
<td>associate dean</td>
<td>&quot;We actually put it in the transfer guide that we encourage them to come after one year.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four-year College E</td>
<td>associate dean</td>
<td>&quot;We have not had much of an increase in the number of credit hours transferred.&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results of this study also lend support to Cohen's (1995) findings that high and low transfer rates were related to institutional characteristics and were not tied to state policy. For example, Cohen found high transfer rates were associated with: (a) an accessible four-year college with flexible admissions; (b) an institutional culture of expectations for transfer; and (c) the use of institutional research data in decision making. Low transfer rates were associated with a campus culture of blaming four-year admissions policies or the lack of student interest in transfer for the low rates of transfer. In this study, the two community colleges (C & D) with the strongest transfer activity demonstrated evidence of Cohen's variables associated with high transfer rates. At the three community colleges with weaker transfer activity, evidence was found of Cohen's variables associated with low transfer rates.

Understanding Policy Implementation in Virginia

Unlike previous studies, this study focused on policy implementation and how the policy is interpreted rather than on variables that may explain transfer rates or descriptions of transfer student characteristics. Several other issues surfaced in this study that were not addressed in the literature search. Table 7 summarizes the types of evidence found to support each of these themes. The first of these themes is related to the receptivity of private institutions to transfer students from the community colleges. According to the transfer counselor at community college B, a large percentage of their students transfer to local private institutions because “they’re more flexible in terms of the courses that apply.” And the transfer coordinator at community college A noted that “private schools are very good about sending out information. The state-supported schools are the ones I have the most trouble getting information from.”
Table 7: Summary of Additional Themes

**Theme 1:** Private institutions, not bound by the state policy, have been more receptive to community college transfers than the four-year public institutions.

<table>
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<tr>
<td>Community College A</td>
<td>transfer coord.</td>
<td>&quot;Private schools are very good about sending out information. The state-supported schools are the ones I have the most trouble getting the information from.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community College B</td>
<td>transfer counselor</td>
<td>&quot;Private colleges are more in terms of the courses that apply.&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Theme 2:** Market forces have a significant impact on transfer behavior of community college transfer students.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Respondent</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community College B</td>
<td>counselor</td>
<td>&quot;When the economy's bad, our transfer curriculums are booming.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;A lot of people can’t afford to go elsewhere.&quot;</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>&quot;Some students choose to go out of state paying out of state tuition because they have to commute.&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;To pick up and move [to attend a Virginia public institution] would mean a loss of job for one or two spouses.&quot;</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Table 7: Summary of Additional Themes (continued)

Theme 2: Market forces have a significant impact on transfer behavior of community college transfer students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community College B</td>
<td>counselor</td>
<td>“Private institutions associate money with the degree by awarding scholarships to degree graduates.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“With the common market agreement with out-of-state colleges, students can go out of state and receive in-state tuition rates.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community College D</td>
<td>division chair</td>
<td>“If the money is not there and they’re paying for it themselves, it’s much more economical to come here.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four-year College E</td>
<td>director</td>
<td>“By the time you figure out how to accommodate demand for one major, the next major du jour has taken off.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Theme 3: Career counseling and transfer advising should be more strongly linked.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community College A</td>
<td>dean</td>
<td>“We’ve got a career center and a transfer center and it’s a long-term plan to get those both in the same general area.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community College Ecoord. counseling</td>
<td></td>
<td>“In counseling, I emphasize it telling students to pick your career first and match your education to it.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 7: Summary of Additional Themes
(continued)

Theme 3: Career counseling and transfer advising should be more strongly linked.

<table>
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<th>Words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Four-year College D</td>
<td>associate dean</td>
<td>“Many students think they want to major in something specific and it really isn’t what they thought it was.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four-year College E</td>
<td>director</td>
<td>“Academic advisors found that they were doing career development and career folks found that they were doing academic advising.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Theme 4: Students should bear much of the responsibility for getting accurate information and making timely decisions about transfer.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community College A</td>
<td>faculty advisor</td>
<td>“The faculty are disturbed by too much pampering of students at the community college.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“We give the wrong message to students that we’re going to do everything for them.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>dean</td>
<td>“We’re trying to move away from an institution where we tell students what to do, to be an institution where we help students decide.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>transfer coord.</td>
<td>“Her problem was no planning. It is their responsibility to select proper classes and to talk with the four-year institution.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 7: Summary of Additional Themes  
(continued)

Theme 4: Students should bear much of the responsibility for getting accurate information and making timely decisions about transfer.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community College B</td>
<td>division chair</td>
<td>&quot;Students have to make earlier decisions about majors and choices of transfer school.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community College D</td>
<td>assessment coord.</td>
<td>&quot;Some students find out that they haven’t been in a transfer program, but nowhere along the line did they share with someone that they wanted to transfer.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community College E</td>
<td>coord. counseling</td>
<td>&quot;It’s the students’ responsibility to know things.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Faculty advisor</td>
<td>&quot;It’s up to them to decide to achieve or not to achieve.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four-year College D</td>
<td>associate dean</td>
<td>&quot;Students need to find out what the prerequisites are.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;It’s almost an impossible task to advise community college students because by their very nature they change their minds.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four-year College E</td>
<td>director</td>
<td>&quot;I think students get good information. I don’t think they understand it.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;Students may not even know how to ask the right questions. Maybe we expect too much.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;If they’ve gone the easy route and skip the things they don’t like, they don’t have the foundation that they needed.&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The responsiveness of private institutions may be attributed in part to market forces and competition with public institutions for students. Market forces also contribute to the regional nature of transfer student enrollment patterns. Table 7 reflects the influence that proximity and economics have on students' choice of institution and majors. The importance of the link between career counseling and transfer advising emerged as a related theme.

Student responsibilities in transfer also emerged as an important theme in policy implementation. The transfer policy appeared to work effectively for students sure of their plans, but a lack of planning, or poor planning on the part of students, was cited as a major obstacle to effective policy implementation.

In summary, the following themes best describe Virginia's state transfer policy.

1. Institutions and departments within institutions did not agree on what the state transfer policy is or what it should look like. As demonstrated earlier, Guba's (1984) framework of policy types was a useful tool for examining the different ways in which policy was defined. In particular, four-year institutions C and D provided evidence of multiple interpretations and effects within the same institution. Community colleges all expressed concern about inconsistencies in transfer practices within and among the four-year institutions.

2. The state transfer policy was interpreted to fit the culture of the four-year institutions. Policy statements were operationalized to fit the culture of the college or university, and the policy was implemented in a way that was consistent with the institution's mission (e.g. selective or flexible admissions). Implementation strategies
reflected the institution’s interpretation of what it means to be in compliance with the policy, or at least to operate within an acceptable range of avoidance tactics.

3. For all of the community colleges, transfer was a regional rather than a statewide phenomenon. Although Virginia has a statewide policy, much of the transfer activity was the result of course-based agreements—both written and unwritten. Proximity of a four-year institution was a strong factor affecting transfer activity. One possible contradiction to the local or regional nature of transfer is the finding that none of the community colleges in this study discussed transfer relationships with one particular four-year institution that offered baccalaureate programs via technology on every community college campus in the state. Perhaps students who enrolled in these programs were not considered to be transfers since they did not physically leave the two-year campus.

4. Judgments about the effectiveness of the policy seemed to be affected by the strength of inter-institutional relationships and the number of separate partnerships institutions had to develop to meet students’ needs. For example, community college C and four-year institution C demonstrated particularly strong ties and transfer activity, and assessed the policy as highly successful. Colleges that fed transfers to, or received transfers from, a number of institutions experienced more problems than those colleges that dealt primarily with one or two institutions. Community colleges A and B and four-year institution D in particular provided evidence of the difficulties with Virginia’s state policy, which cannot offer a “one-size-fits-all” solution to transfer issues and concerns.

5. Course-based, rather than broad-based, articulation agreements were the
Student’s best assurance that guaranteed admission would be honored and that prerequisite courses would be accepted and applied toward the baccalaureate degree. All of the community colleges preferred to negotiate articulation agreements with four-year institutions rather than to rely on the state policy for assurances about the transferability of coursework. Four-year institutions A and D were confident that their two-plus-two agreements were highly successful where the general state policy was not.

6. Most transfer problems could not be resolved by the state policy because they were tied to prerequisites in the major rather than to differences in the general education core. A significant problem for both two- and four-year colleges seemed to be that students transferred an excess of elective credits and yet did not meet basic prerequisites for their majors.

7. Implementation strategies at four-year institutions reflected Virginia’s historical themes of elitism, concerns over academic standards, and institutional autonomy in higher education. Evidence that community colleges do not negotiate on an equal level with four-year institutions was cited earlier. Community colleges A and E were especially concerned about access and equitable treatment and whether or not two-year college students were being subjected to standards different from those applied to native students. All four-year colleges expressed concerns about the quality of some two-year college courses and the prerogative of four-year institutions to determine their standards.

8. Data available to the community colleges on the performance of transfer students were primarily anecdotal. Very little was known about transfer statewide. Most studies on transfer in the state have been institutional specific (e.g. community college E
and four-year institutions D and E). Aggregate data on applications, acceptances, credits awarded, academic standing, and graduation rates of community college transfers have not been systematically monitored. Because of the lack of statewide data, the effect of the transfer policy on transfer activity was largely unknown.

9. Incentives for compliance or consequences for non-compliance have not been tied to implementation of the state transfer policy. The issue of resources to enforce or implement the policy has not been addressed at the state level. Four-year colleges A, D, and E were especially concerned about policy implications for over-enrolled majors.

10. The policy has assumed that transfer is a linear process from the community college to the four-year institution, but for many students, transfer more closely resembled a circle or a spiral—a process that may have included concurrent or alternating enrollments in one or more two- and four-year institutions. Transfer activity between community colleges A, C, and D and four-year institutions A, C and D included the phenomenon of reverse transfer.

11. Although not bound by the State Policy on Transfer, private institutions have been more accepting of community college transfer students, particularly of graduates from the occupational or applied degree programs. Community college B demonstrated the importance of private and out-of-state institutions to two-year college transfer students. In accommodating transfer students by going beyond the requirements of the state policy, private colleges may gain competitive advantage for students over local public four-year institutions.

12. All of the colleges in the study commented that non-traditional characteristics of community college students may have contributed to transfer problems that have been
difficult to address through the state policy. Students often used the community college
to explore their interests and abilities, and they frequently changed their minds about the
careers, academic programs, and transfer institutions they wanted to pursue. Poor
planning and failure to seek out appropriate sources of information typically contributed
to the obstacles students faced in transfer.

13. Based on numerical data on transfer activity, the impact of Virginia’s state
transfer policy on transfer practices at most institutions appears to have been minimal.
Transfer activity since 1993-94 has been flat. Although colleges acknowledge that the
policy has improved communications between two- and four-year institutions, it appears
to have effected few changes in terms of admissions decisions or the way credits are
applied.

Implications and Recommendations

One of the questions posed at the beginning of this study was whether or not
colleges and universities have viewed Virginia’s State Policy on Transfer as effective in
achieving policy goals. Guba’s (1984) framework of policy types was used to examine
what policy looks like to those who implement policy at the institutional level. But a
complete picture of policy implementation must also include an examination of the
policy-makers as well—an issue not addressed by this study.

The Implementation Model for Virginia’s State Policy on Transfer in Figure 2
illustrates the relationship between policy makers and policy implementers. In
developing the model, it was assumed that policy makers developed the transfer policy in
the context of a political value system and knowledge of the social, political, ethical
consequences of policy alternatives and resources available to enforce the policy.
Virginia's policy was formulated through a process that involved all stakeholders—students, two- and four-year institution faculty and administrators, the department of education, and members of the state's coordinating and governing boards and staffs. Based on historical documents, the public interests that the policy was designed to serve were: (a) protection of institutional autonomy and diversity, (b) assurance of quality in instruction and student outcomes, (c) efficient use of the Commonwealth's resources, (d) protection of the consumer's investment, and (e) sufficient numbers of baccalaureate degree graduates to serve workforce needs of the Commonwealth.

Policy implementers (public colleges and universities) developed strategies to implement the policy in the context of a value system (e.g. institutional autonomy, elitism) for higher education, institutional cultures, and the resources available for policy implementation. Decisions concerning the level of compliance or avoidance of the policy were made at the institutional level and negotiated with the policy makers through a process of annual reporting to the state's coordinating board for higher education. Based on institutional documents and interviews with campus personnel, colleges perceived the intended outcomes of the policy to be protection of institutional autonomy and academic integrity, and equitable and fair treatment for all students in terms of access and a reasonable assurance of success.

As shown by this study and illustrated in Figure 2, the way in which policy makers and implementers define the policy can affect the way policy is formulated and implemented, and ultimately what the policy outcomes will be. To the extent that policy definitions overlap, policy makers and implementers may achieve consensus and narrow the gap between policy formulation and compliance/avoidance.
One element of the model not considered in this study was the element of resources to enforce and implement the policy. As noted earlier, no resources were allocated in Virginia to provide incentives, and no provisions were made to withhold resources for compliance or non-compliance with the policy. No funds were appropriated to assist colleges that could potentially experience enrollment growth as a result of policy implementation, and no funds were provided to develop the statewide transfer data and articulation system described in the policy. The potential effect that an infusion of resources might have on the results of this study is unknown.

What are the implications of this implementation model for Virginia’s state transfer policy? What do the themes that emerged from this study suggest about Virginia’s State Policy on Transfer?

1. State policy should continue to provide guidance and direction in matters of transfer and articulation and avoid prescribing admission standards or quotas or mandating transferability of courses. Policy should ensure equitable and fair treatment but allow flexibility for institutions to adapt to local needs and institutional culture and mission.

2. The state should develop and maintain a database and statewide articulation system to disseminate information and monitor transfer activity statewide. Descriptive and quantitative data will contribute to better decision making and recommendations about needed changes in transfer policies and practices. Statewide decision making requires statewide information for tracking and enrollment planning.
3. On a pilot basis, the state should provide incentives and resources to colleges to implement the policy to see what effect additional resources would have on transfer activity in the state.

4. The state should fund on a pilot basis an initiative to develop competency-based agreements for transferring a general education core. Such agreements would ensure that students have agreed upon general education skills and knowledge without requiring specific course equivalencies to demonstrate achievement of general education objectives. Such an approach to articulation also permits more effective transfer for students who choose not to complete the associate degree, and for students who complete an applied degree program.

5. To ensure that students have appropriate prerequisite skills, the state should encourage and support the development of consortial or regional agreements for transfer and articulation in career areas or fields. These agreements should provide greater assurances to local community college students that they will have a reasonable chance for success and ample opportunities to achieve a baccalaureate degree in a reasonable period of time. Applicants from other community colleges or regions should be given the same opportunity to qualify for admission under the terms of these agreements.

6. The state should facilitate statewide discussions among institutions about transfer-related issues to identify common areas of concern and needed changes in policy or practice. Transfer is no longer a linear process from a two-year to a four-year institution, but involves student movement between and among a number of institutions and educational delivery systems (e.g., distance learning, non-credit training and certification, advanced standing for high school credits).
Future Research

The focus of this study was policy implementation at the institutional level—what does Virginia’s State Policy on Transfer mean to the state’s colleges and university’s relative to their institutional policies and practices for transfer and articulation? The collective case study design captured a range of transfer activity and demonstrated the similarities and differences in policy definitions and implementation strategies adopted by institutions of varying sizes, geographical locations, student demographics, and college missions. The study provided a rich context for understanding how interpretations of the transfer policy affect both the way the policy is implemented and the outcomes. Results also reflected the governance structure of higher education and the historical context for transfer in Virginia. Finally, this qualitative study lends support to the findings of other quantitative studies on transfer practices nationwide.

Virginia’s state transfer policy is less prescriptive than other SREB state policies that mandate admissions, acceptance of credits, or a common course numbering system. It does not provide incentives for compliance, nor does it impose consequences for non-compliance of the policy. Yet Virginia’s state policy is designed to achieve policy goals and outcomes much like those that prompted passage of transfer and articulation policies in other states. This suggests a need to examine how the various SREB state policies are interpreted and the effect those interpretations have on the way policies are implemented at the institutional level. Do institutions in other states with more prescriptive policies and stronger mandates experience similar problems or assess their policy’s effectiveness in the same way? How do policy outcomes compare?
From a public policy perspective, research is needed on the costs to institutions and to the state of encouraging transfer and enforcing transfer policies. Is there any potential benefit to four-year institutions offering baccalaureate degrees at the community college, either by a physical presence on the campus or through technological means? Are there ways, other than statewide transfer and articulation policies, to achieve public policy and institutional goals?

What are the effects of market forces on transfer activity in the state? To what extent do tuition costs, availability of jobs, supply and demand of particular programs and courses, and length of program or time to degree impact transfer activity? What are the implications for state transfer policies? With the increase in the number of for-profit education providers, what are the policy implications for transfer and articulation between public and private institutions? Research is needed into alternative models of student progression if, as this study demonstrated, transfer is no longer a linear process.

Finally, quantitative and descriptive data and information are needed to monitor the effects of state policy on transfer activity. Which institutions have the highest level of transfer activity? How many community college students apply to transfer? How many credits do they present and how many are accepted in transfer? How many transfer students actually enroll at the four-year institution? How many remain in good standing and complete the baccalaureate degree? Compared to native students, how many credits do transfer students accumulate by the time they finish the four-year degree? How many institutions do transfer students attend in the process of completing a degree? Is there any evidence to show that state policies make a difference in transfer activity?
Lessons Learned

Perhaps the most difficult challenge in undertaking a study of this kind is to keep the project manageable. As I interviewed the faculty and staff at each of the colleges, issues emerged that could stand alone as valuable topics for further examination, and it was difficult to avoid the temptation to stray from the focus of this study. Much more data was gathered than could reasonably be presented, and the task of gleaning only the most pertinent thoughts from all that were expressed left me questioning whether or not I had truly captured what my respondents wanted to say. In future research, two techniques that should be used to strengthen confidence in the results are member checking and peer debriefing. These techniques were not formally used in this study because of time constraints.

Another lesson learned through this study was that the interview guide is a critical tool when the interview is the primary method of data collection. Because of my interest in avoiding bias and staying focused on the topic, I resisted at times the urge to follow my instincts and pursue thoughts that could have been valuable. I also avoided direct questions even when the topic was specific that I wanted respondents to address. More extensive pilot testing of the interview guide would have been helpful.

The study could have been expanded (perhaps beyond the point of manageability) by adding student interviews to the case studies. Student interviews could have added depth and credibility to the study as a third voice. Viewed in a different way, Guba’s framework possibly suggests that transfer policy could be effective at different levels—at the level of intent (policy makers), at the level of action (policy implementers), and at the level of experience (students). Although the level of intent was addressed in this study
through the use of historical documents, the student's experience with the transfer policy—from the student's perspective, was not.

Unlike previous studies on state policies, however, this study contributed to an understanding of how statewide policies are implemented at the college level. Most of the research for this study found references to studies on student characteristics—demographics, transfer patterns, and academic performance. Some studies dealt with institutional characteristics such as transfer rates, support services, and curriculum. In some studies, obstacles to transfer were identified and recommendations were made for developing effective transfer programs that included institutional agreements on the acceptance and application of credits. But as a journalist in New Jersey wrote concerning the horror stories about transfer in that state, descriptive studies tell us that

the stories are bound to keep coming as long as certain subjects are taught differently from one [state] school to the next, as long as certain schools are more prestigious than others, as long as students exhibit a certain youthful disinterest in long-term planning (Kladko, 1999, p. A1).

Limited research on state transfer policies has described the historical development, the political climate, or the potential social consequences of state-mandated policies. One of the assumptions often made in states' decisions to adopt a transfer policy is that all institutions are alike—at least with regard to the first two years of a baccalaureate degree program. But very little research has been conducted on the effects of state policy on institutional practices related to admission standards, curriculum structure, student outcomes or enrollment growth, except to examine transfer rates from community colleges to four-year institutions.
This study provided evidence that in spite of a uniform state transfer policy, transfer looks different depending on how institutions interpret, define, and implement the policy.

Thus, although states mandate definite admissions policies, course equivalencies, implementation of technology in order to centralize information, and collaboration between all sectors of the education system, ultimately the future effectiveness of transfer is the degree to which the individual community colleges view transfer as an academic objective. Even though financial incentives and accountability measures may encourage institutions to promote transfer, if the responsibility and authority within an institution is not so directed and motivated, the impact is likely to be minimal (Rifkin, 1996, p. 80).
Appendix A

Virginia's State Policy on Transfer
(Available: http://www.schev.edu)

Table of Contents

Introduction
Admissions
Acceptance and Application of Credits
Transfer Module
Communication and Information
Administrative Responsibility for Transfer
Services for Transfer Students
Transfer Student Responsibilities
Minority Students and Transfer
Tracking Transfer Students
Footnotes
SCHEV/VCCS Guidelines for the Transfer Module
State Council of Higher Education and the Virginia Community College System

Introduction

Virginia's system of public colleges and universities has extended higher education throughout the Commonwealth from Eastern Shore to Big Stone Gap and from Fairfax to Southside. The system gives students ready access to college and enables them to choose from among many two- and four-year institutions. The Commonwealth has created a remarkable system intended to provide an educated and responsible citizenry and well-trained professionals.

For Virginia to achieve these goals fully, especially in a time of financial stringency, the system must function as efficiently and effectively as possible. This means institutions must work together in partnerships for the benefit of students. The Commission on the University of the 21st Century believed that cooperation among institutions is essential. "We cannot place too much emphasis upon the importance of cooperation," the Commission wrote.

Some students begin college at a community college and subsequently transfer to a senior college or university to achieve their educational aspirations. These students must be assured of fair access to a four-year education and reasonable credit toward a bachelor's degree for their community college courses and program. Transfer should be easy and orderly.
According to the Commission on the University of the 21st Century, "It should be made as easy as possible for graduates of community colleges to transfer to senior institutions and get full credit for the work they have done."

Transfer is also a matter of national interest. The American Council on Education recently issued a major policy statement - Setting the National Agenda: Academic Achievement and Transfer. The ACE believes that qualified community-college students should be able to "transfer easily and routinely" to senior colleges and universities. "America's community colleges in particular embody our hopes for the future. For millions of students, they are the entry point to higher education and thus serve as the avenue to intellectual and economic growth. Entry to senior colleges or universities by community college students, i.e., transfer, is central to the realization of equal opportunity in education."

This goal of smooth and orderly transfer has not been fully achieved, even though a number of community colleges and senior institutions have worked together diligently. There are still important issues to resolve regarding, for example, transfer of credits, inconsistency in the content of presumably similar courses, incomplete transfer guides, the absence or inadequacy of articulation agreements, and ineffective communication between senior institutions and community colleges.

Ideally, students should be able to move through Virginia's public education system as if it were a continuum, rather than a system of distinct levels or separate stages.

The Joint Committee on Transfer Students was established by the State Council of Higher Education and the State Board for Community Colleges in October 1990. The membership includes faculty and administrative representatives from both community colleges and senior institutions, with staff support from the Virginia Community College System and the State Council. The JCTS has been charged with recommending means to facilitate transfer from community colleges to senior institutions. The Committee has, in effect, been asked to recommend policies that will foster improved transfer practices in the Commonwealth.

To help arrive at policy recommendations on transfer, the JCTS sought the opinions of students, faculty, counselors, and administrators through a series of campus hearings. Held in April of 1991, the hearings resulted in several major findings about the status of student transfer in Virginia. These findings helped focus the committee's work on those issues most in need of resolution. The committee also examined transfer policies adopted by more than a dozen other states. An early draft of the report was the focus of discussion at a major conference on transfer held at the University of Virginia on October 10, 1991. Subsequent drafts were discussed with the General Professional Advisory
Committee and the Instructional Programs Advisory Committee. All of these discussions provided the committee with valuable suggestions for improving and clarifying the document.

The Joint Committee has been guided by several assumptions in formulating the policy it is recommending:

All capable students in the Commonwealth should have access to four years of higher education.

The institutional autonomy and diversity of Virginia colleges and universities are valuable and must be assured.

Every senior institution should take significant responsibility for enrolling community college students.

Effective transfer is a joint responsibility of community colleges and senior institutions.

Transfer students and native students should be assured of equitable treatment by each senior college and university.

Students should be encouraged to advance as far through the educational system as they are able.

Students should not have to repeat coursework they have completed satisfactorily at a community college.

The Commonwealth should have a coherent statewide policy on transfer that encourages continuing cooperation and can be sustained over time.

The Joint Committee on Transfer Students herewith recommends a statewide policy to facilitate transfer between state-supported community colleges and senior colleges and universities. The Committee also recommends a series of implementation measures necessary to effect this policy.

This policy — consisting of a set of modest proposals — can make a real difference. Anything less will probably not achieve the goal of making transfer both easy and routine. The policy requires change by community colleges and senior institutions. It also requires commitment by both to common goals on behalf of students and education. It requires a strong sense of mutual concern and trust.
I. Admissions

1. Senior institutions have authority over admissions decisions to their institutions and to programs within their institutions. However, each senior institution should have a policy, approved by appropriate institutional parties and reviewed regularly, on admission of transfer students.

2. This policy should be based upon sound information about performance of transfer students at the institution and should be consistent from year to year. It should address matters such as the number of Virginia community-college transfer students who will be offered admission, whether students from the local area are given preference, and whether preference is given to students who have been awarded a transfer associate degree or to those who have completed the transfer module (see Section III for a description of the transfer module).

3. Each student who satisfactorily completes a transfer-degree program at a community college in Virginia should be assured the opportunity to transfer to a state-supported baccalaureate institution. It is the responsibility of all senior institutions to provide reasonable access to community-college graduates who meet the typical admissions criteria of a given institution. Student performance in a transfer-degree program is a strong indicator of success in senior institutions and, therefore, should count heavily in the evaluation of transfer applicants.

4. Transfer admissions priority should be given to students who have completed a transfer degree over those who have not.

5. Admission to a given institution does not guarantee admission to particular degree-granting programs, majors, minors, or fields of concentration. Nevertheless, every baccalaureate degree program should provide reasonable avenues for admission of transfer students.

6. Admission to specific programs, majors, minors, and fields of concentration may require, for example, a minimum grade point average and specific prerequisite courses. Such requirements should be applied equally to native and transfer students.

II. Acceptance and Application of Credits

1. It is the intention of the Commonwealth of Virginia that students who begin their work toward the baccalaureate degree by enrolling in
transfer programs in community colleges will have this work recognized as legitimate and equivalent to that offered at senior institutions.

2. Articulation between community colleges and senior institutions is a reciprocal process. Community colleges have the responsibility of ensuring that their programs and courses are equivalent to those offered at senior institutions, and senior institutions have an obligation to recognize such work as equivalent, once the two parties have determined equivalency.

3. Students who have earned an associate degree based upon a baccalaureate-oriented sequence of courses should be considered to have met lower-division general-education requirements of senior institutions. These students will be considered to have attained junior standing (typically defined by credits completed at the senior institution). It may, however, take transfer students longer than two years to complete the baccalaureate because of prerequisites in the major or other requirements or circumstances.

4. Where students must satisfy additional general-education requirements -- credits in upper-division general education or foreign languages required of native students, for example -- senior institutions should specify and publish such requirements.

5. Some occupational-technical programs (the Associate of Applied Science and the Associate of Applied Arts) have counterparts in senior institutions (e.g., nursing, engineering technology, hotel and restaurant management). Senior institutions and community colleges should look for ways to facilitate student transfer into these programs. Transfer from occupational-technical programs will continue to be worked out through articulation agreements or on a case-by-case basis.

6. Community colleges should counsel carefully those occupational-technical students who express an interest in transfer in their choice of appropriate courses. And senior institutions should be well informed about community-college curricula so that students do not need to retake courses that essentially repeat courses from the community-college program.

III. Transfer Module

1. Although community colleges typically recommend that students complete the associate degree prior to transfer, many students choose to transfer before graduating.
2. It would be beneficial, therefore, to adopt a mechanism that a) provides a recommended program of study for students who begin at community colleges without a clear sense of their future educational goals, b) assists students in planning a rigorous and well-rounded program of study prior to transfer, and c) provides them with certain guarantees about the acceptability of the courses in this program of study.

3. At the same time, this mechanism could help senior institutions by a) presenting to them transfer applicants who had fulfilled many of their general-education requirements, and b) relieving them of the need to review student transcripts on a course-by-course basis.

4. The transfer module, which is available from a community-college transfer officer, presents such a mechanism. In essence, the transfer module is a coherent set of courses that forms the foundation of a solid liberal education for college students and assures students that a core of courses will transfer. Although the module may not satisfy all general-education requirements at a senior institution, the institution should guarantee at a minimum that it will accept these courses and that they will apply toward meeting general-education requirements.

5. All courses must be completed within the Virginia Community College System, and students must earn a grade of C or better in each course if they wish to transfer the set of courses as a module.

6. Each senior institution should publish the set of courses that it considers equivalent to this module and the extent to which the module satisfies its general-education requirements. If necessary, senior institutions should specify those courses beyond the module that students must satisfy to have completed the general-education requirements of that institution or its individual programs. The senior institution may have, for example, additional lower-division credit requirements, upper-division general education requirements, and may also require demonstrated competency in foreign languages.

7. Some professional schools — such as engineering, fine arts, and pharmacy — may determine that the transfer module is not congruent with their lower-division requirements. In such cases, these schools or colleges should sign general articulation agreements with the Virginia Community College System that specify a more appropriate lower-division general-education program of study. If the professional school does not publish specific criteria and does not enter into an agreement with the community colleges, then the transfer module will apply and be honored by those schools.
8. Community-college students fulfilling the module with satisfactory performance will be certified by the VCCS as having completed the module. This will assure them that they will receive 35 credits at any state-supported senior institution to which they have been admitted. Students are not required to complete the associate degree to have their transfer module accepted.

IV. Communication and Information

1. Community colleges and senior institutions — and state agencies as well — share an obligation to facilitate transfer. Good communication is the single most important factor in successful student transfer and articulation. Therefore, all parties should ensure effective communication with one another. Such communication needs to take place statewide as well as on a local or regional basis.

   Faculty in the same disciplines in community colleges and senior institutions should meet periodically to discuss common issues.

   Community colleges should create opportunities for students who have transferred from their college to meet with current students who are considering transferring.

   Senior institutions should provide periodic advising sessions to potential transfer students prior to the time they transfer.

   Community-college counselors should meet at least once a year with key transfer decision-makers from senior institutions to discuss program changes. (For example, the associate dean of the business school who handles all transfer students would discuss changes, if any, in program requirements needed to transfer to the business school of that institution.)

   Counselors and faculty at community colleges who advise students on transfer should meet periodically to discuss issues such as program changes.

   Transfer decision-makers at senior colleges and universities should meet periodically with the faculty in their institutions who advise students on transfer to update them on possible changes.

   Senior colleges and universities should provide students who transfer with a formal evaluation of their transfer credits prior to their initial registration.
2. Articulation agreements between community colleges and senior institutions and their individual programs are beneficial to student transfer and should be encouraged. Articulation agreements work only if they are developed and maintained mutually between representatives from community colleges and senior institutions, they are widely disseminated and clearly stated, they spell out clearly what, if anything, is guaranteed to students, both parties abide by them, and community colleges and senior institutions inform one another promptly whenever they change program or degree requirements. Institutions should abide by their original agreements long enough for transfer students to adjust to the changes.

3. Consistent with current practice, all senior institutions should publish a transfer guide annually. Transfer guides are the most important method by which baccalaureate-bound students can plan an appropriate program of study at a community college. Transfer guides work best if the information on transferability of credit is current, the information and format are consistent among senior institutions, they are easily available to students, faculty, and counselors, program-specific requirements are available in the guides, and they are provided prior to fall registration.

4. The current transfer guides do not make use of available technology for the efficient transmission of information. Therefore, the state should establish an on-line electronic database in an interactive format that assists prospective transfer students in making course selections in such a way as to maximize transferable credits to the senior institutions.
V. Administrative Responsibility for Transfer

1. One person should be designated as chief transfer officer at each institution or campus.

2. Each senior institution should establish a central source of information on transfer. This clearinghouse function might be housed in the admissions office or be served by a central database that can be accessed widely on campus.

3. In addition, a person at each school or college at the senior institution, preferably someone within each dean's office, should be designated as the person with final authority on transferability of courses in the major. A process for students to appeal decisions about transfer of credits should be established and well publicized.

VI. Services for Transfer Students

Transfer students to senior institutions should have, to the extent possible, the same opportunities as other native students of comparable standing in such areas as course selection, registration, access to campus housing, and financial aid.

VII. Transfer Student Responsibilities

Students intending to transfer need to take responsibility for planning their course of study to meet the requirements of the institution(s) to which they desire to transfer. The student is responsible for seeking out the information and advice that is necessary to develop such a plan. Students are encouraged to choose as early as possible the senior institution and program into which they would like to transfer. Delays in developing and following an appropriate plan or changes in plans (e.g., change in major) may reduce the applicability of transfer credit to the degree program a student ultimately selects.

VIII. Minority Students and Transfer

In order to ensure that minority students are being encouraged to pursue the bachelor's degree, community colleges should determine whether minority students are being counseled into or otherwise
enrolled disproportionately in programs that are not designed to transfer.

IX. Tracking Transfer Students

1. Senior institutions should report community-college transfer-student progress to the community colleges in a consistent, identifiable form. This information should track students for at least three years or until the student graduates or withdraws from the senior institution, whichever comes first.

2. Community colleges should use these data to improve upon or confirm the success of their programs and should demonstrate how these data are being used in their annual reports on assessment to the State Council of Higher Education. In analyzing the data, community colleges should pay particular attention to the performance, retention, and graduation rates of students by race.

3. Likewise, senior institutions should track the subsequent progress to the baccalaureate of transfer students by race.

Footnotes

All references to community colleges also apply to Richard Bland College and its students.

Transfer degrees are the Associate of Arts (A.A.), the Associate of Science (A.S.), and the Associate of Arts and Sciences (A.A.&S.).

This statement is based on Table 5-1 ("Minimum Requirements for Associate Degrees in the VCCS"), adopted by the State Board for Community Colleges, December 1991, for implementation fall 1993.

Transfer students who pursue an A.A.S. degree program would benefit particularly from such a mechanism. Currently these students have no formal option for combining occupational-technical preparation with transfer-oriented general-education sequence of courses.
SCHEV/VCCS
GUIDELINES FOR THE TRANSFER MODULE

The transfer module serves as an advising tool for students who begin at a community college without a clear sense of their future educational goals, who are uncertain about where they will seek admission to a baccalaureate program, or who choose to transfer without completing the associate degree.

Those students who are clear about their intended major and choice of senior institution should consult with their community college transfer officer about the specific requirements for that major and institution, especially as they relate to mathematics and science requirements.

The transfer module, found on the reverse side, is a coherent set of courses that forms the foundation of a solid liberal education for college students. The transfer module is not intended to represent the full set of general education courses required of VCCS associate degree graduates.

A senior institution is considered to be in compliance with the State Policy on Transfer with regard to the transfer module when it:

- accepts the module (35 credits distributed as specified in the module with a grade of "C" or higher) as partial or complete fulfillment of general education requirements

- AND -

- publishes transfer module course equivalencies
  (publication in catalog and/or transfer guide showing specific "transfer module" course equivalencies, specifying whether each transfer module course is accepted for general education credit or for transfer elective credit, and specifying remaining general education requirements beyond transfer module courses.)

The State Policy on Transfer also allows professional schools (e.g., engineering, fine arts, pharmacy) to determine whether the transfer module is congruent with lower-division requirements. If the module is not congruent, the professional school may negotiate a separate articulation agreement with the VCCS indicating how a more appropriate lower-division general education program may be followed by prospective transfer students.

VCCS institutions will certify those students completing the transfer module and print the certification on the student's permanent record card and transcripts. The certification will signify that 35 credits have been completed from within the transfer module distribution categories and courses outlined in the State Policy on Transfer, that all courses have been completed within the
VCCS, and that all required transfer module courses have been completed with a grade of "C" or better.

STATE COUNCIL OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND THE VIRGINIA COMMUNITY COLLEGE SYSTEM

Transfer Module

Students must select from the following courses in order to complete the transfer module. All courses must be completed within the Virginia Community College System, and students must earn a grade of C or better in each course if they wish to transfer the set as a module. This package should be acceptable at all senior institutions throughout the state as complete or partial fulfillment of their general education requirements. Senior institutions should specify and publish those courses or distribution requirements that they consider equivalent to this module.

ENGLISH (6 credit hours)

ENG 111-112: College Composition

HUMANITIES (6 credit hours)

ART 101, 102: History and Appreciation of Art
MUS 121, 122: Music Appreciation
ENG 241, 242: Survey of American Literature
ENG 243, 244: Survey of English Literature
ENG 251, 252: Survey of World Literature
HUM 201, 202: Survey of Western Culture
PHI 101, 102: Introduction to Philosophy
PHI 211, 212: History of Western Philosophy
Note: Studio courses in the Fine Arts are excluded from the transfer module, but may be acceptable at the institution of the student's choice.

SOCIAL SCIENCE (6 credit hours)

ECO 201, 202: Principle of Economics
GEO 221, 222: Regions of the World
PLS 211, 212: U.S. Government
PLS 241, 242: International Relations
PSY 201, 202: Introduction to Psychology
PSY 231, 232: Life Span Human Development
SOC 201, 202: Introduction to Sociology
SOC 211, 212: Principles of Anthropology
SCIENCE (8 credit hours in one sequence, including lab)

- BIO 101-102: General Biology
- BIO 231-232: Human Anatomy and Physiology
- CHM 101-102: General Chemistry
- CHM 111-112: College Chemistry
- CHM 113-114: University Chemistry (10 cr. hrs)
- PHY 101-102: Introduction to Physics
- PHY 201-202: General College Physics
- GOL 105-106: Physical and Historical Geology
  Or the combination of GOL 105: Physical Geology with NAS 130:
  Elements of Astronomy

HISTORY (6 credit hours in one sequence)

- HIS 101-102: History of Western Civilization
- HIS 111-112: History of World Civilization
- HIS 121-122: U.S. History

MATHEMATICS (3 credit hours)

- MTH 151: Mathematics for Liberal Arts I
- MTH 163: Precalculus I
- MTH 166: Precalculus with Trig. (5 cr.)
- MTH 173: Calculus with Analytic Geo. (5 cr.)
- MTH 175: Calculus of One Variable
- MTH 181: Finite Mathematics I
- MTH 240: Statistics
- MTH 241: Statistics I
- MTH 270: Applied Calculus
- MTH 271: Applied Calculus I
- MTH 273: Calculus I (4 cr.)
  Also, VCCS MTH courses offered prior to Fall 1994
  MTH 161: College Algebra and Trig.
  MTH 165: College Algebra
  MTH 171: Precalculus Mathematics I

Total credit hours = 35

NOTES: Many senior-college programs, particularly BA programs, require majors to take courses or demonstrate competency in a foreign language. Although foreign languages are not included in the transfer module, students should begin these requirements early in preparation for transfer.

Additionally, many senior-college programs have specific mathematics and
science sequences required or recommended for particular majors. Students should consult with a community college transfer advisor to determine appropriate math and science sequences.

The number of credits and distribution requirements in the module were influenced by studies of lower-division general-education requirements common to at least 80 percent of the Commonwealth's senior institutions and by the general-education requirements for the transfer associate degrees of the Virginia Community College System (Table 5-1).
Appendix B

SAMPLE -Letter of Informed Consent

September 1, 1999

(Faculty or Staff Member)
Virginia Community College
Anywhere, VA 23456

Dear (Faculty or Staff Member):

My name is Lonnie Schaffer, and I am a candidate for the Doctor of Education degree at the College of William and Mary in Virginia. I am conducting research on transfer policies and practices, and your (college dean or chief transfer officer) has identified you as a person knowledgeable about student transfer from community colleges to four-year colleges and universities. I am asking you to participate in a doctoral dissertation research study to examine the link between transfer policy and transfer activity. Interviews are being conducted with selected community colleges and four-year institutions to include a range of transfer activity.

Your participation is entirely voluntary. There will be no compensation involved, and no adverse consequences should you decide not to participate or to answer any of the questions asked during a one-hour interview. The interview will be relatively unstructured and the focus will be on transfer policy and practices. With your permission, the interview will be tape recorded so responses can be transcribed later for analysis, but neither you nor your institution will be identified in the study. Results of this study will not be used in any way to mandate changes in campus policies or practices, but results will be made available to interested participants.

The underlying assumption in this study is that understanding the “why” and the outcomes of public policy help to improve policy decisions. In Virginia, even though the state has access to student data and can monitor transfer enrollments, policy makers have little information or knowledge of what works from a state policy perspective. This study will contribute to that knowledge base, and your participation is important to that effort.

I will be contacting you in the next few days to schedule an interview at your convenience and in the privacy of your office. If you have any questions concerning this study or your participation in it, please do not hesitate to contact me by phone at 804/794-8482 or by E-mail at Lschafer@vccs.cc.va.us. I look forward to talking with you soon.

Sincerely,

Lonnie Schaffer
Doctoral Candidate

Dissertation Committee Chair:
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Appendix C

Guide for Campus Interviews

Q1: You were selected for this research because you were identified as someone knowledgeable about transfer. Tell me about your role and involvement with transfer at (institution).

Q2: Describe for me the significance of transfer to the mission of (institution). How does transfer fit into the life and culture of the college?

Q3: Walk me through the steps of what you do when a student wants to know about transfer opportunities and requirements.

Q4: What resources do you have available to assist students with transfer?

Q5: What should students know about transfer from both the community college and the four-year college perspectives?

Q6: What do you know about students' experiences with transfer once they leave (institution)? Can you give me some examples or stories of what happens to students when they transfer to four-year colleges and universities?

Q7: How are transfer issues resolved for students? How do you think transfer issues should be resolved?

Q8: What has been your experience with the State Policy on Transfer?
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Vita

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Education:

1996 The College of William and Mary
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1972 Michigan State University
    East Lansing, Michigan
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1970 University of Iowa
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