

Reverse Articulation and UMass Boston

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I recently attended a workshop titled *Data and Decisions to Support Student Success* at the National Symposium on Student Retention (NSSR) in Mobile Alabama. One of the topics mentioned was reverse articulation. In reverse articulation, students who transfer from a community college to a four-year college or university without graduating but after completing 30 or more credits at the two-year school have credit for work at the four-year institution transferred back to the sending college. Once enough credits have been transferred and any distribution requirements are met, the student receives an Associate's degree from the community college.

This benefits everyone. The two-year college raises the number of degrees it grants and may improve its graduation rate. The four-year institution has the student for all course work after transfer instead of losing the student back to the community college as the student strives to receive a credential. The school also establishes itself with the student as caring about and working toward his/her success. The student is the biggest winner, receiving an Associate's degree which is a legitimate credential that may help working students receive raises or promotions that make it easier to continue at the four-year institution uninterrupted. The Associate's degree is also a mark of success. The student gets a sense of achievement in completing the Associate's degree that may encourage him or her as they continue to the Bachelor's degree. In general, society benefits from a better educated workforce and a credential is created that provides a measure of educational success.

Much has been made lately of the U.S. fall in the percentage of adults with higher education credentials. Without reverse articulation, when a student leaves the community college to attend a four-year institution before receiving the Associate's degree, the student remains uncredentialed until the Bachelor's degree is attained. Should the student leave the four-year institution without a Bachelor's degree, the student remains uncredentialed even though s/he may have completed academic work far in excess of that required for an Associate's degree.

UMass Boston Enrolls large numbers of community college transfers most of whom come without an Associate's degree. In fall 2009, the five public two-year colleges who sent us the highest number of transfers, Bunker Hill Community College, Massachusetts Bay Community College, Massasoit Community College, Quincy College, and Roxbury Community College sent us over 530 students. Of these, about 260 entered UMass Boston with between 30 and 59 transfer credits inclusive. By the beginning of the spring 2010 semester, 160 of these students had accumulated a total of 60 or more credits. If these credits were transferred back to the two-year schools, combined they could have granted as many as 160 additional Associate's degrees. The breakout by individual school is presented in Table 1, which follows.

**Table 1: Number of Fall 2009 Community College Transfers
Accumulating 60 or More Credits by the End of the Semester**

Last School Attended	Number of Fall 2009 Entrants
Bunker Hill Community College	57
Massachusetts Bay Comm. Coll.	23
Massasoit Community College	21
Quincy College	39
Roxbury Community College	24
Total	164

An additional 26 students had accumulated 60 credits by the end of spring 2010.

**Table 2: Additional Fall 2009 Community College Transfers
Accumulating 60 or More Credits by the End of Spring 2010**

Last School Attended	Number of Fall 2009 Entrants
Bunker Hill Community College	9
Massachusetts Bay Comm. Coll.	3
Massasoit Community College	6
Quincy College	3
Roxbury Community College	5
Total	26

Overall, within one academic year, the five colleges could have granted as many as 190 Associate's degrees to students entering UMass Boston in fall 2009.

Community college transfers also enter in high numbers in the spring semester. In spring 2010, the same five schools sent us about 300 new transfers. Roughly 150 of these students entered with 30 or more and less than 60 credits. In keeping with the fall entrants behavior, by the end of the first semester, about half, 73, of those students had accumulated 60 or more credits. See Table 3 for which schools would have benefitted.

**Table 3: Number of Spring 2010 Community College Transfers
Accumulating 60 or More Credits by the End of the Semester**

Last School Attended	Number of Spring 2010 Entrants
Bunker Hill Community College	32
Massachusetts Bay Comm. Coll.	6
Massasoit Community College	8
Quincy College	16
Roxbury Community College	11
Total	73

Given the numbers of credits they registered for the fall 2010 semester, if successful in their classes another 39 spring 2010 entrants should accumulate 60 credits by the end of the semester.

Table 4: Additional Spring 2010 Community College Transfers Expected to Accumulate 60 or More Credits by the End of Fall 2010

Last School Attended	Number of Spring 2010 Entrants
Bunker Hill Community College	12
Massachusetts Bay Comm. Coll.	6
Massasoit Community College	7
Quincy College	5
Roxbury Community College	9
Total	39

Within a year of entering more than 300 transfers from these five colleges might have been able to acquire Associate's degrees if UMass Boston had reverse articulation agreements in place with these schools.

Table 5: Potential Additional Degrees by Sending College

Last School Attended	Potential Additional Degrees Within One Year of Entering UMass Boston
Bunker Hill Community College	110
Massachusetts Bay Comm. Coll.	38
Massasoit Community College	42
Quincy College	63
Roxbury Community College	49
Total	302

Of course, it is unlikely that all of these students would choose to have their credits transferred back in order to receive an Associate's degree. Many of them might not be eligible if less than 30 of the credits transferring into UMass Boston were not earned at the sending school. Some of the students may be handling this reverse transfer for an Associate's degree on their own, so any program we create might just simplify something that would happen anyway.

However, while we looked at just the five schools listed, in fall 2009, other Massachusetts community colleges sent us almost 150 new transfer students. Further, others of the transfers might not accumulate the 60 credits for more than a year. With reverse articulation agreements in place with the public two-year colleges, there is the potential for UMass Boston students to receive and for the two-year colleges to be credited with several hundred degrees that might otherwise not be produced. Several of the schools could have the number of degrees granted improved considerably with this program. Table 6 has the details.

Table 6: Possible Impact of Additional Degrees

Last School Attended	Potential Additional Degrees From UMass Boston	2009 Degrees Granted	Potential UMass Boston Degrees as a PCT of Current	Three-year Graduation Rate
Bunker Hill Community College	110	657	17%	10%
Massachusetts Bay Comm. Coll.	38	420	9%	15%
Massasoit Community College	42	734	6%	12%
Quincy College	63	420	15%	24%
Roxbury Community College	49	195	25%	6%
Total	302	2,426	12%	NA

If the program is established, the costs for UMass Boston would be minimal. During orientation, incoming students could be asked if they are transferring from a community college without a degree and if they would like UMass Boston to contact their previous school to see if they would be eligible to graduate if some additional credits were transferred back to the previous school. Advisors could deliver the same message when helping to set up a class schedule. Once we had a list of interested students and their written permission to contact the previous school, an institution specific list could be generated and sent to each sending school. It would be their responsibility to assess the students' transcripts and notify us if the students were eligible. Once the eligible students were identified, a flag could be set in their records that would automatically generate a transcript for each student at the end of each semester and send it to the school. Again, the sending school would be responsible for assessing the transcript. Once the student had enough credits for the Associate's degree the two-year school could grant it to the student and notify us. This would allow us to remove the flag from the student's record and would give us an accurate count of additional degrees granted to UMass Boston students. Almost everything at the UMass Boston end would be automated once the lists were generated and the flags set. One non-automated task after the original set-up would be to have someone remove the flag and record the degree.