

NISTS 2023

BE A CONNECTOR FOR TRANSFER STUDENT SUCCESS

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The following presentation was given at the 21st Annual Conference for the National Institute for the Study of Transfer Students. Please cite responsibly and direct questions to the original presenter(s).

Research Spotlight

2756 - The True-Life Story of Transfer Students' Credits: The Bad and the Good

Credits and Degree Pathways, Transition Programs and Supports

We tracked the degree applicability of vertical transfer students' credits over time using a daily archive of student course records. Only a small proportion of the non-degree-applicable credits that students evidenced after transferring had acquired that status due to transfer. Detailed understanding of credits' degree applicability over time is needed in order to determine which advising and other strategies will best ensure that transfer students accumulate as few non-degree-applicable credits as possible.

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The True Life Story of Transfer Students' Credits: the Bad and the Good

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The City University of New York



A True Team Effort

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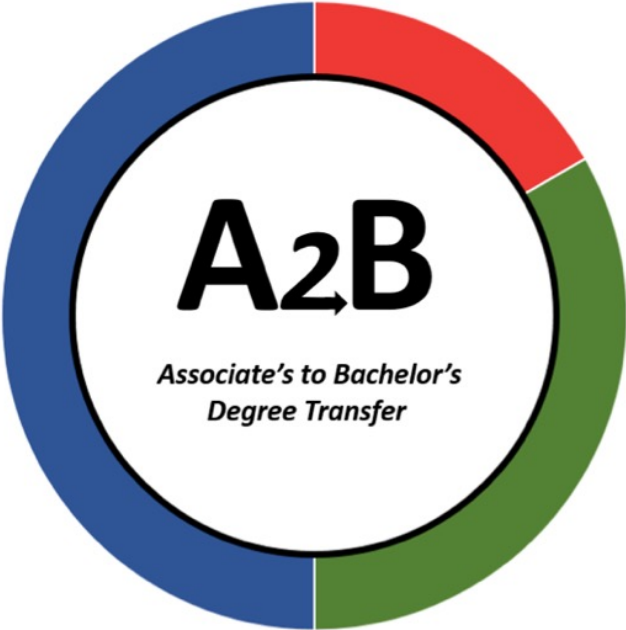




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Chris Buonocore, Director of Student Success Initiatives, Lehman College, CUNY

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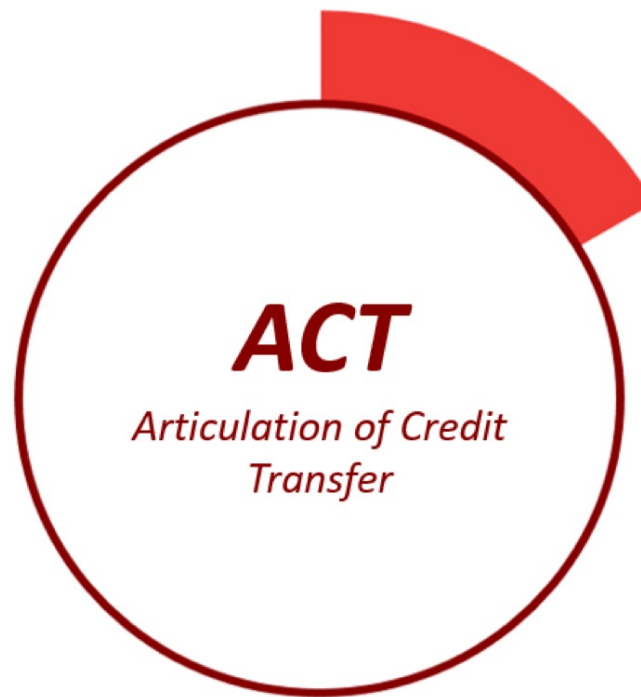
Please listen to the four other A2B presentations at this conference:

Wednesday 4:10-5:00, Concurrent Breakout Session: Faculty Views about Student Transfer from Community to Bachelor's-Granting Colleges, Vita Rabinowitz, Yoshiko Oka, & Alexandra Logue

Wednesday 4:10-5:00, Concurrent Breakout Session: Using A University-Wide Initiative to Fuel Transfer Reforms: Transfer Explorer At CUNY, Christopher Buonocore, Christopher Vickery, Kara Heffernan, & Pooja Patel

Friday, 12:00-12:50, Concurrent Breakout Session: Students, Faculty, and Staff Views on Transfer: Text Analysis of 34 Focus Groups and 35,000 Surveys, David Wutchiett, Kerstin Gentsch, & Alexandra Logue

On-Demand Video: Advantages of Humanities Transfer Students: Differences in GPA, Graduation, and Graduate Study, David Wutchiett & Vita Rabinowitz





This presentation is about the transfer of college credits.

What is your role and experience with transfer credit, including setting policy for credit transfer, advising concerning credit transfer, and evaluating transfer credit?



Background on Transfer

- Approximately 3 out of every 8 students eventually transfer between colleges.
- Approximately 42% of United States college students begin their postsecondary experience in an associate's-degree program
- Over 80% of community college freshmen want at least a bachelor's degree
- Only 11% of community college freshmen get a bachelor's degree within 6 years.
- There are many reasons for the leaks in this vertical transfer pipeline, but research shows many of these reasons concern challenges in the transfer process.
- If are 2 students equivalent in every way we can measure who both want bachelor's, and one begins at a community and the other at a bachelor's college, the one who begins at the bachelor's college will be more likely to get bachelor's.
- Given the percentages of underrepresented students are higher at the community than the bachelor's colleges, these transfer challenges differentially harm students from underrepresented groups.
- Transfer is an equity issue.



Lost Credits

- Often cited as a major reason for leaks in the vertical transfer pipeline.
- But what are lost credits?
 - Credits that disappear when a student transfers from one college to another.
 - More accurately: Credits that change from being applicable to degree requirements to not applicable to degree requirements when a student transfers from one college to another.
 - Are two possible ways that can happen: (1) credits disappear upon transfer and (2) credits become excess electives upon transfer.
 - Unless credits apply to degree requirements (including the electives needed) they are useless.
 - Dean Dad (IHE blogger): "Many four-years claim to 'accept' credits, but they only give them 'free elective' status, which renders them irrelevant. 'Free elective' status is where credits go to die."
- How have lost credits been studied?
 - 10 previous studies have examined whether vertical transfer students lose credits.
 - Method: Time-consuming exam of individual students' transcripts to see if credits transferred at all.
 - None have examined the degree-requirement applicability of the credits.



TOP's Goal for the Present Research:

Find out what happens to students' credits' degree applicability when students transfer.



Caution!

- The results reported here will not necessarily generalize to other transfer paths. The data come from transfer students from CUNY's Bronx and Hostos Community Colleges to CUNY's Lehman College, all three of which are located in the Bronx, New York, and all three of which have been working together productively for many years to articulate their programs.
- This research says nothing about excess credits accumulated in bachelor's programs.



Research site: The City University of New York (CUNY)

- CUNY has a total of about 220,000 undergraduate students, most of whom are Pell recipients and members of underrepresented racial/ethnic groups.
- There are 7 community colleges with only associate's-degree programs, and 12 colleges with bachelor's programs, spread throughout New York City.
- About 20,000 students transfer within CUNY each year.
- Over 50% of the graduates of each bachelor's college consists of transfer students.
- There is a centralized system for course equivalencies and student information.
- Within CUNY, every course transfers with at least elective credit.
- CUNY is an ideal place to study transfer.



Data Source: Degree Works

- We are going to be talking about the Ellucian product called Degree Works, which is used at CUNY to record and audit student academic records.
- What is your familiarity with Degree Works? Is it used at your college or university? (If yes, please put your Zoom hand up.)



Problem #1: Can We Determine Credits' Degree Applicability? Yes!

- CUNY uses Degree Works for recording & auditing students' academic records.
- Degree Works classifies credits as satisfying specific degree requirements or as not satisfying degree requirements (what we call *Fall Through* credits)
- There are four categories of Fall Through:
 - Electives allowed (elective credits needed for the total number of credits for degree)
 - Insufficient (courses with insufficient grades, such as F)
 - **Overflow (elective credits in excess of the # credits needed for degree)**
 - **Over the limit (credits in excess of the # a college allows to transfer)**
- The sum of the two categories in bold constitutes the credits we are interested in (= CUNY lost credits not applying to degree requirements)



Problem #2: So all we have to do then to see if transfer makes students' credits inapplicable is to look at transfer students' current records and count the Not Applied credits, correct?

No!

Degree Works is a transactional database that overwrites itself every time there is a change in a student's record.

So if a vertical transfer student's record contains Not Applied credits from a previous community college, we don't know when those credits became inapplicable. It could have happened at the community college or at the bachelor's college, and not as a result of transfer.



Enter: The ACT Archive

- The original archive includes Degree Works records of 870 vertical transfer students from CUNY's Bronx Community College or Hostos Community College to Lehman College.
- We archived these students' Degree Works records each time there was a change in the record.
- We then determined *Applied to Degree* or *Not Applied to Degree* status for each student's community college course credits at three time points: just prior to transfer, just after transfer, and current (the time of the analysis).



Results



Total

Community College
Credits Taken = 44,478



Total

Just prior to transfer

Community College
Credits Taken = 44,478

Not Applied to Degree = 860

Applied to Degree = 43,618



Total

Just prior to transfer

Just after transfer

Community College
Credits Taken = 44,478

Not Applied to Degree = 860

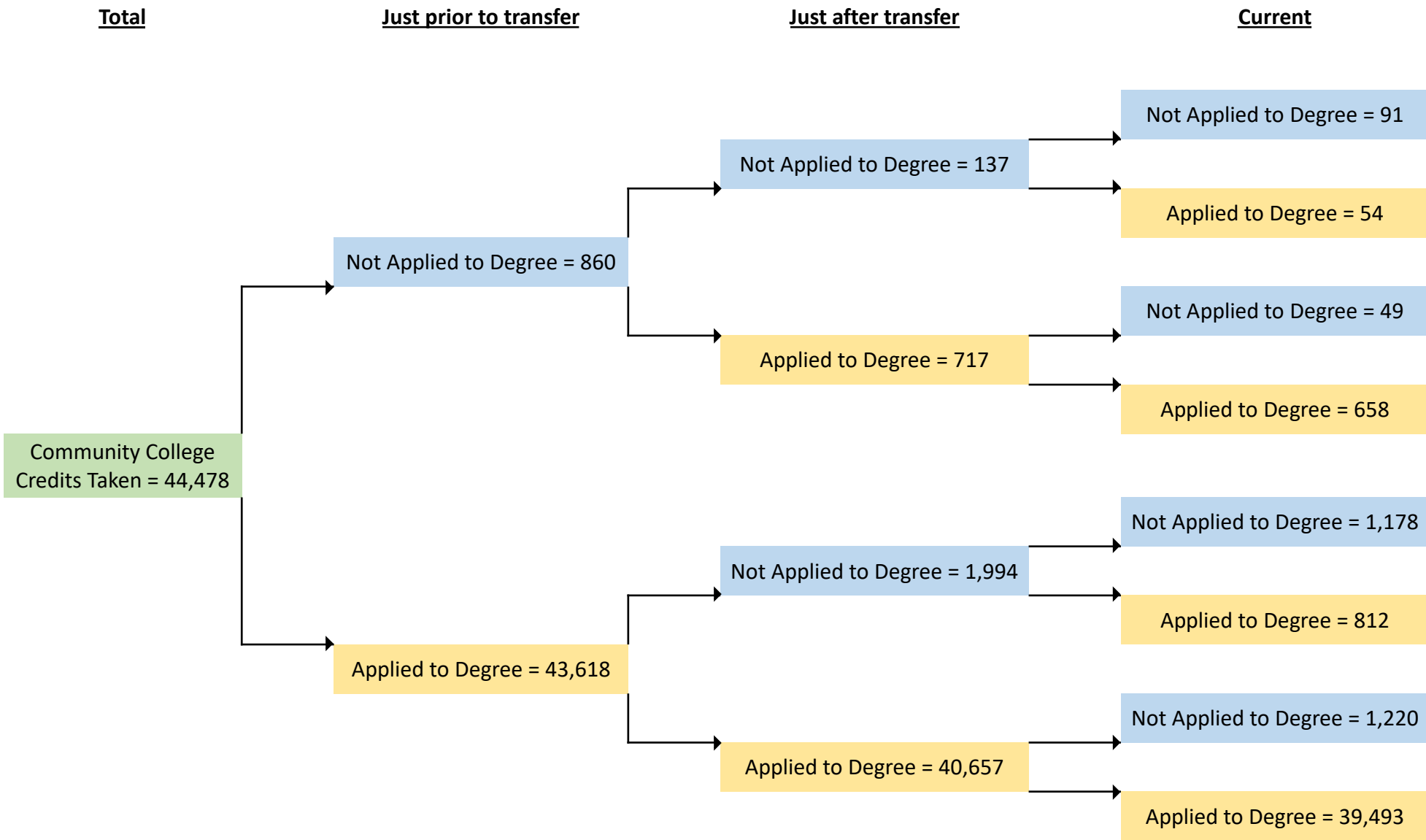
Not Applied to Degree = 137

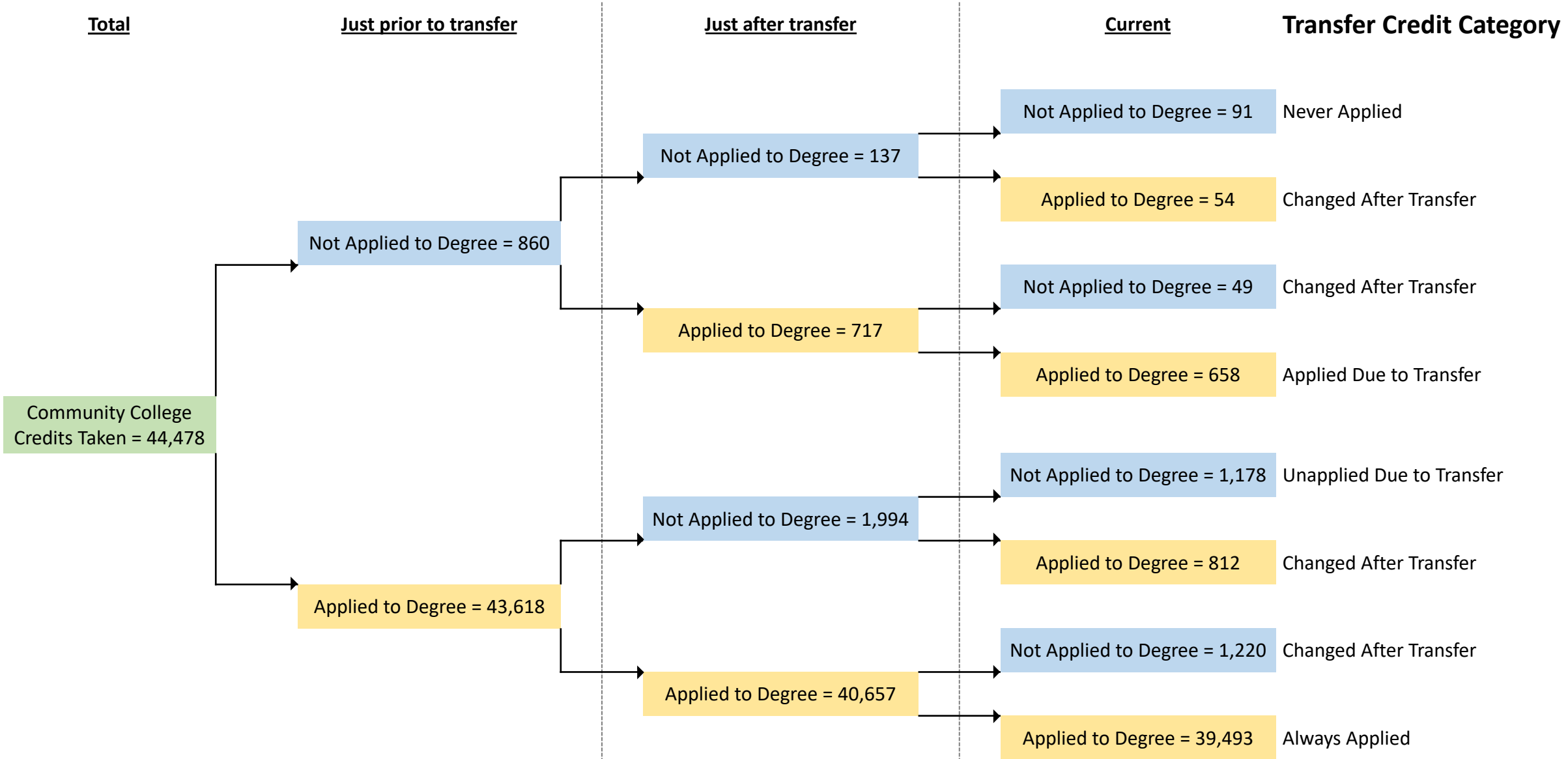
Applied to Degree = 717

Applied to Degree = 43,618

Not Applied to Degree = 1,994

Applied to Degree = 40,657







%s and #s of Credits in Transfer Credit Categories

<u>Category</u>	Percentage of All (43,555) Current Community College Credits <u>% (N)</u>	
Never Applied (credits that did not apply at all three time points)	0.2 (91)	
Applied Due to Transfer (credits that did not apply at the community college but became and stayed applicable after the student transferred)	1.5 (658)	
Unapplied Due to Transfer (credits that applied at the community college but became and stayed not applicable after the student transferred)	2.7 (1,178)	
Always Applied (credits that applied at all three time points)	90.7 (39,493)	^a At the current time, 866 of these credits were applicable to degree requirements and 1,269 were not.
Changed After Transfer (credits whose applicability changed from just after transfer to the current time) ^a	4.9 (2,135)	



Percentage of Total Current Unapplied Credits That Became Unapplied Due to Transfer

- Total number of current unapplied credits (sum of current blue box numbers): $91 + 49 + 1,178 + 1,220 = 2,538$
- Total number of current unapplied credits that became unapplied due to transfer: 1,178
- Percentage of total current unapplied credits that became unapplied due to transfer: $1,178 \div 2,538 = .464$ In other words, **46.4%**.



What are some of the reasons that credits can change their applicability other than transfer?

- Student declares or changes their major.
- Student adds a minor or concentration.
- There has been a mistake in the previous assessment of credits.
- Other ideas?



Conclusions

- Credits can move in and out of applicability at any time
- Students can gain applicable credits by moving from an associate's to a bachelor's program (that's the good news in the title of this presentation).
- An assessment solely of a student's current excess (or completely lost, which this method can also track) credits that originated in the student's previous college may be inaccurate for determining the effect of transfer on credits.
- Although the problem with "lost credits" due to transfer is severe, it may not be as large or as ubiquitous, at least in some cases, as previous research has indicated. (More good news.)
- This research also highlights the excess credits that students accumulate for reasons other than transfer, credits that make getting a degree take longer and be more expensive.
- There is work to be done on several fronts to make higher education more efficient, helping students to progress to a degree before an event in their complex lives prevents them from completion.

The Future

- CUNY is now archiving the Degree Works information for all vertical transfer students from its community colleges to its bachelor's colleges, about 10,000 vertical transfer students per year.
- This will enable analyses regarding which types of students, courses, disciplines, and transfer paths result in more or less loss of credit degree applicability, and therefore facilitate targeted interventions to decrease credit loss as a result of transfer.
- What are some of the other implications of this research for practices and policies that will enhance credit transfer and transfer student success?
- In what journal would you like to read more information about this work?



Thank you!

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