The Interstate Passport: A New Framework for Transfer

The Interstate Passport Initiative, based at the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE), has launched a new learning-outcomes-based framework for transfer with the goal of improving graduation rates, shortening time to degree, and saving students’ money. The new framework focuses on the lower-division general education core, the common denominator among institutions—concentrating on it as a whole, not on individual courses—and allows for a cross-border “match” of outcomes-integrated general education cores for block transfer. The Passport is being rolled out in phases; Phase I concluded in September 2013.

The academic areas included in the Passport are based on the Liberal Education and America’s Promise Essential Learning Outcomes (LEAP ELOs) developed by the Association of American Colleges and Universities and widely adopted by institutions across the country.

Learning Outcomes and Proficiency Criteria for Transfer
Sixteen two-year and four-year institutions from four states (HI, ND, OR, UT) in the WICHE region, which were involved in the two-year pilot project leading to the development of the new framework, have signed the Passport Agreement. This five-year agreement applies to the Phase I Passport Block that includes the academic content areas of oral communication, written communication, and quantitative literacy. Students who complete the Passport Block at one Passport institution will receive credit for the lower-division general education requirements in these content areas when they transfer to another Passport institution, and will not be required to repeat any courses in the receiving institution’s Passport Block.

Faculty from the Passport signatory and other institutions worked collaboratively to develop the Passport Learning Outcomes (PLOs) and attendant Proficiency Criteria for Transfer in the three academic content areas, acknowledging that their institutions’ lower-division general education learning outcomes in these areas are equivalent to the Passport Learning Outcomes. Institutions are not required to use the same language as the PLOs in their learning outcomes, but rather, to ensure alignment to the PLOs.

Faculty Agreement and Tracking
The Passport is based on the concepts of faculty agreement and tracking. Faculty members at a Passport institution agree with their colleagues at other Passport institutions to: 1) provide their respective students with appropriate learning opportunities addressing the PLOs; 2) assess these students’ proficiency in achieving the PLOs; and 3) award the Passport to students who have earned it. Each institution agrees to send data to the Passport Central Data Repository (CDR) on the academic performance of Passport and non-Passport students who transfer into their institution for two terms after they transfer. The CDR sorts the data from the receiving institutions and forwards it to the relevant sending institutions for use in their continuous improvement efforts. The CDR also forwards aggregate data to the Passport Review Board for its annual review of the overall performance of the Passport program. The board’s members consist of one representative appointed by each participating state. Registrars and institutional research representatives from the Passport pilot institutions developed the processes for recording the Passport on student records, and for tracking and reporting on Passport students resulting in a set of guidelines published on the Passport website.

Looking Ahead
Other institutions and WICHE states may now apply for participation in the Passport. The Passport Review Board, whose members are representatives from each Passport state, reviews and approves new institutions/states for participation.
The Passport framework containing the Phase I content areas was funded by a grant from the Carnegie Corporation of New York. Plans are underway for the next phase of the Passport Initiative, in which Passport Learning Outcomes and Proficiency Criteria for Transfer will be developed for the remaining lower-division general education core content areas – humanities/creative arts, intercultural knowledge (social sciences), information literacy, and the natural/physical sciences, as well as two cross-disciplinary areas: critical thinking; and teamwork and problem-solving.

When the Passport Initiative is complete, it will encompass all lower-division general education content areas, simplifying the transfer process for many students, and be ripe for expansion beyond the WICHE region. With approximately 33 percent of today’s students transferring—and nearly 27 percent of them crossing state lines according to a study by the National Student Clearinghouse—the Passport promises a new way to streamline transfer students’ pathways to graduation.

PASSPORT PHASE I INSTITUTIONS
(Founding Members)

HAWAI‘I
Leeward Community College
University of Hawai‘i West Oahu

NORTH DAKOTA
Lake Region State College
North Dakota State University
North Dakota State College of Science
Valley City State University

OREGON
Eastern Oregon University
Blue Mountain Community College

UTAH
Dixie State College of Utah
Salt Lake Community College
Snow College
Southern Utah University
The University of Utah
Utah State University
Utah Valley University
Weber State University

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Institution Application:
www.wiche.edu/info/passport/institutionApplication.pdf

State Application:
www.wiche.edu/info/passport/stateApplication.pdf