

Highlights of [GAO-06-22](#), a report to congressional requesters

# TRANSFER STUDENTS

## Postsecondary Institutions Could Promote More Consistent Consideration of Coursework by Not Basing Determinations on Accreditation

### Why GAO Did This Study

Each year thousands of students transfer from one postsecondary institution to another. The credit transfer process, to the extent that it delays students' progress, can affect the affordability of postsecondary education and the time it takes students to graduate. Seeking information on the processes and requirements that postsecondary institutions have in place to assess requests to transfer academic credits, Congress asked GAO to examine (1) how postsecondary education institutions decide which credits to accept for transfer, (2) how states and accrediting agencies facilitate the credit transfer process, and (3) the implications for students and the federal government of students' inability to transfer credits.

### What GAO Recommends

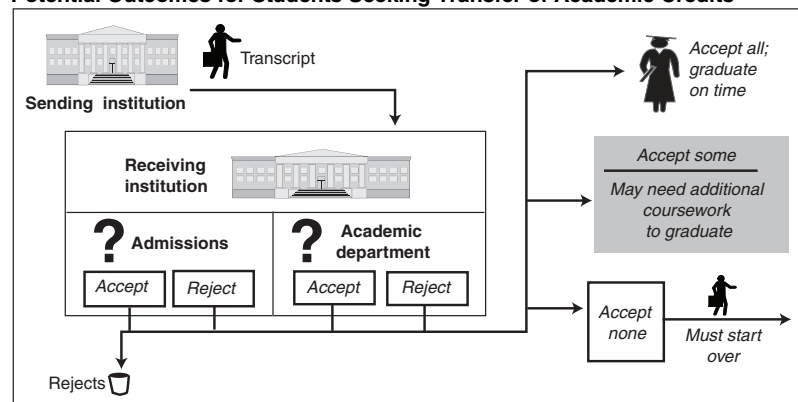
GAO suggests that Congress consider further amending the Higher Education Act of 1965 to require postsecondary institutions eligible for Title IV funding to not deny the transfer of credit on the basis of a sending institution's type of accreditation.

### What GAO Found

When deciding which credits to accept from transfer students, receiving institutions consider the sending institution's type of accreditation, whether academic transfer agreements with the institution exist, and the comparability of coursework. However, institutions vary in how they evaluate and apply a student's transferable credits. Many officials from postsecondary institutions with regional accreditation told GAO that they would not accept credits earned from nationally accredited institutions. To streamline the transfer process, most institutions have transfer agreements with other institutions that generally provide for the acceptance of credits from the other institution without further evaluation. In some instances, institutions review student credits—not rejected for other reasons, such as accreditation—to determine comparability to their academic offerings.

State legislation, statewide initiatives, and the accreditation standards that accrediting agencies set help facilitate the transfer of academic credits from one postsecondary institution to another. Among other things, states support the establishment of statewide transfer agreements, common core curricula, and common course numbering systems. Accrediting agencies facilitate the transfer process through the standards they set. The accrediting agencies that GAO reviewed generally adhere to the principle that institutions should not accept or deny transfer credit exclusively on the basis of a sending institution's type of accreditation.

Potential Outcomes for Students Seeking Transfer of Academic Credits



Source: GAO analysis and Art Explosion.

A student's inability to transfer credit may result in longer enrollment, more tuition payments, and additional federal financial aid, but current data do not allow GAO to quantify its effects on the students or the federal government. Data are not available on the number of credits that do not transfer, making it difficult to assess the actual costs associated with nontransferable credits.

[www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-06-22](http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-06-22).

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Cornelia Ashby, (202) 512-7215, [ashbyc@gao.gov](mailto:ashbyc@gao.gov).