



**Assembly Committee on Colleges and Universities  
Public Hearing, September 12, 2019  
Assembly Bill 371  
Testimony of State Representative Dave Murphy**

Madam Chair and members of the committee, thank you for hearing Assembly Bill 371 today.

Each year thousands of our Wisconsin college students transfer from one public college to another within our state. Many of those students quickly learn that they have to spend another semester, or more, to repeat the same course, and pay for it again, simply because it did not transfer. It's not just the student paying twice, taxpayers are also chipping in to cover this unnecessary duplication.

There are currently over 600 transfer students at UW–Madison alone and UW System estimates that there are over 600 “program articulation agreements” that they have negotiated in order to patch their broken system of transfer, like Band-Aids on a broken dam.

Improving college transfer is a critical and long overdue step to getting students the credentials they need and have worked hard to earn.

As a student at UW–Fox Valley I needed to transfer to get my real estate broker's license. We need to recognize the reality that sometimes students need to transfer in order to earn their credentials and our public colleges should be doing everything possible to make transfer as transparent and seamless as possible. We have a lot of adults in Wisconsin who haven't finished their degree or credential, as long as we keep transferring credits this difficult, I have no hope that we're going to fix that.

We also need to recognize the reality that vocational and baccalaureate learning naturally overlaps. There is an outdated section of statute put in place to prevent UW System and WTCS from teaching the same program without permission from the other.

While in the 1970s it may have been in the state's interest to ensure that welding and political science weren't being taught on the same campus, today we live in a world where innovation demands collaboration. In fact, UW System campuses regularly ignore the statutory mandate that they should not be expanding their “mission to include the preparation of persons for semiprofessional or skilled-trade occupations” while at the same time denying WTCS campuses from expanding their “collegiate transfer program offerings.”

Eliminating this already ignored section of statute will increase collaboration and allow students to determine where they can receive the best education, instead of maintaining artificial government barriers to innovation.

Our solution to the transfer problem is to require UW System and the Wisconsin Technical College System to implement a universal course numbering and transfer system within the next five years.

This is a flexible solution that respects the academic freedom of faculty and allows UW System and WTCS to design their own implementation plan. Unlike other states that have implemented credit transfer mandates, our plan does not specify courses or lock the colleges into a system that might not work down the line. It doesn't require that every course be taught at every campus. It simply recognizes the fact that every academic program taught at our public institutions is accredited by the same accrediting agency, so it's ridiculous that students cannot transfer from one campus to another with the same program and maintain the same earned credits.

Universal course numbering will not decrease academic quality—in fact, it will increase cross campus collaboration, allow for system-wide data collection on course demand and completion, and improve our ability to allocate resources to where they are needed most.

The timeframe is ambitious, but our students and colleges have been struggling with transfer since this system was founded nearly fifty years ago. In fact the five year timeframe was offered by our technical college leadership as what is realistically required to implement it.

This is the concrete solution that creates real change for students and saves money and effort over time.

When I met with Governor Evers about this bill, he mentioned that he too was a transfer student and that it was long past time that we work together to fix this problematic and unnecessary problem.

Implementing this may incur upfront costs; however, I ask our colleges, why have you not made this investment already? Why instead have you invested millions into complex transfer agreements that aren't even utilized and transfer advisors who are necessary to help struggling students navigate the maze of credit transfer? The current cost, to students and colleges, to maintain the existing bureaucracy of credit transfer agreements is far more than the cost of implementing universal course numbering and transfer.

Instead of choosing the best, most affordable solution for students and the state, colleges have implemented overly complicated barriers to transfer, simply because it allows them to continue to avoid collaboration and defend the boundaries of each institution.

This is one of the many issues that merging UW System in the 1970s, nearly fifty years ago, was supposed to solve. I'm offering five years, an eternity in the eyes of students, for us to fix it.