

Articulation: the Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

Articulation agreements are usually formed at the institutional level. However, many states, like Colorado, have in place state-wide articulation agreements between two-year and four-year schools in specific academic areas. (In Colorado, for example, there is an agreement for General Education, Business, and Engineering.)

The problems that still occur tend to take place within specific academic departments. Courses from two-year colleges may transfer in terms of credits to the four-year institution, but many majors, such as computer science, won't count these courses towards an actual degree in CS. For transfer students, that's when the experience can turn ugly. It is at this point that many students will explore other programs to determine whether their coursework and credits can be used more efficiently in a different degree field, leading many to switch disciplines.

Good articulation agreements should make clear how credits transfer over, and whether they will be “counted” towards a specific degree.

Departments, such as CS, that suffer from low enrollment and low retention should make it their duty to clarify articulation agreements to ensure they are coherent and easily understood by both advisors and students. Students should know which courses will count towards a degree and which ones will not, so they can plan accordingly while enrolled at a two-year school.

Map out the courses that students should take while at a two-year college and which courses they should wait to take from the four-year department.

Create a handout that details a coherent “path of least resistance.” (See Articulation Agreements: “Path of Least Resistance” for Students in the resource folder titled “Articulating Transfer Pathways.”)