

Purposes

The Montana University System Transferable Core ("MUS Core") was approved by the regents in 2006 as a systemic approach to meeting lower-division general education requirements. As part of the operational rules for the "MUS Core," students are cautioned to "select classes that are also required in their major. That efficient use of coursework could help students complete their degree more quickly, since the classes could be used to satisfy both the requirements of the major and the requirements of the MUS General Education Core."

The Choices That Count (CTC) Pathway Certificate Program under development assists students in making those selections by providing a prescribed subset of the courses identified by the General Education Council as eligible selections for the Montana University System Transferable Core ("MUS Core"). The Choices That Count Pathway Certificate is intended to meet the following objectives of Montana's COLLEGE!NOW Initiative:

1. Improve transfer rates and persistence to degree by focusing and simplifying student planning, college advising, and processes and practices complicating transfer. For these purposes, the Choices That Count Pathway Certificate focuses student choices and streamlines advisor "homework" to a prescribed set of courses with the assurance that they "count" toward requirements of the receiving campus's major, as well as toward completion of the receiving campus's approved general education program.
2. Bring the transfer mission to all MUS-affiliated two-year colleges to expand affordable, locally available options for higher education. As the transfer mission is introduced in communities with co-located two-year and four-year institutions, it will be important to distinguish the transfer programming of the co-located college from that of its affiliated university and to offer the transfer mission on both campuses in fiscally sustainable ways. The Choices That Count Pathway Certificate offers one way to make a clear distinction between the focused, prescribed transfer program at the two-year campus and the broader array of choices at the co-located university. The narrower selection within the CTC Pathway program also reduces the resources needed to bring the transfer mission to these campuses.
3. Coordinate curriculum to support inter-campus collaboration and resource-sharing. As higher education costs rise, higher education funding shrinks and demand for access expands, MUS collaboration, innovation, and resource-sharing, particularly online, are crucial to the sustainability of our campuses and the system itself. The Courses That Count Pathway Certificate encourages campuses to share a common set of general education coursework as a common "core," which in turn opens the door to shared 2+2 articulations with four-year campuses.

In addition, the Courses That Count Pathway Certificate is intended to:

- assist students with broad or undecided higher education goals in choosing general education courses that will work for a variety of majors and campus destinations;
- assist campuses in sustainable efforts to extend access to higher education to under-served communities and demographics, whether through dual enrollment, online programming or extension sites; and
- provide students with a recognized, respected credential for completing the foundational requirements for a bachelor's degree in their chosen major.

Status Report

1. System data was mined and academic officers consulted to identify prospective courses for the Choices That Count Pathway, beginning with those MUS Core courses approved by the General Education Council that are (a) most commonly taken by students, (b) most commonly offered by campuses, and (c) most versatile in meeting the requirements of a broad range of majors. The resulting list of courses became the "choices that count."

2. Catalog requirements throughout the system were then reviewed to identify specific choices students would need to make to meet degree requirements in approximately 30 majors. This information resulted in revisions to the inventory of "choices that count" and in the creation of the advising matrix that accompanies this document.
3. The Chief Academic Officers were asked to vet the advising matrix for accuracy with program leaders at the campus level and respond with suggestions by September 3. MSU, MSU-Billings, MSU-Great Falls, and Flathead Valley Community College responded, and all cautioned that their campuses have not had the time to undertake a thorough vetting. Based on the comments they did receive, additional revisions have been made, but the proposal for the CTC Pathway Certificate presented in the Advising Matrix further validation and refinement.

Challenges to Resolve

1. An intensive effort must be undertaken at the campus level to validate the advising matrix for the CTC Pathway Certificate. The courses included in the matrix must accurately identify the major-specific requirements for lower-division general education courses, and the campuses simply have not had the time to date to engage in this work.
2. BOR Policy 301.10, which provides the policy framework for the Montana University System Transferable Core upon which the CTC Pathway Certificate is based, should be clarified so that campuses and students understand that completing the CTC Pathway Certificate (or "the MUS Core" for that matter) does not necessarily mean that all lower-division general education requirements in a particular major have been met.
3. Inconsistencies across campuses with respect to the prerequisite or placement scores required for enrollment in certain CTC courses complicate the efficiency and efficacy of the advising matrix. For example, although STAT 216 is offered by five of the six four-year colleges in the MUS, there are four different prerequisite requirements across the system. Two of the campuses require the equivalent of high school Algebra II as a prerequisite, which means it can be included in the CTC without including a "hidden prerequisite." However, the three other campuses require a 100-level math course as a pre-requisite (and at two campuses, a different 100-level math course), so the CTC Pathway may be more "cluttered" on some campuses than on others.