



Transfer Pathways to College

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Attending a community college to earn an Associate's degree before transferring to a 4-year university is becoming an increasingly popular option for students pursuing higher education. It is no secret that the cost of a college education has skyrocketed within the past few decades, making it harder than ever for students facing financial difficulties to have a traditional college experience. We hope that this resource can serve as an informative guide to give you a better idea on whether the transfer pathway to college is right for you.

Established Transfer Pathways to Colleges in Wisconsin

There are three main places a student can start out at before transferring to a UW campus: a different UW school, a technical college, or a private/out-of-state college. The UW System Guaranteed Transfer Admission Program guarantees admission to any other UW university as a junior for students who begin at a UW university and meet the minimum eligibility requirements. To read more about these requirements, visit Transfer Wisconsin at wisconsin.edu/transfer/guaranteed-transfer/.

If you plan on taking the transfer pathway, it is important that you begin working with an academic advisor at your first institution as soon as possible to ensure a smooth transition to the school you want to transfer to. Your advisor can offer you more personalized advice on what previous students at that school have done to transfer to your desired institution and the best classes to take for your intended major.

Transferology is a free tool used by current college students to see how their credits will transfer between different schools in the University of Wisconsin System and the Wisconsin Technical College System.

When is the Transfer Pathway a Good Idea?

Spending the first two years of college at a community or technical college is a great idea for students who are worried about the cost of college and want a more affordable way to obtain a Bachelor's degree. Additionally, if there is a community or technical college close to where you live, this can help cut costs even more since living at home and commuting to college is an option.

The transfer pathway is also a good choice for students who do not know what they want to major in after high school and want to spend a year or two exploring their options in a more low-stakes environment. This way, you can take classes that interest you without worrying about spending thousands of dollars on credits that might not end up counting toward your degree. Additionally, the smaller class sizes and focus on teaching over research at community colleges means that community college students generally have more access to their professors. Your professors can be great resources for advice on your future career and classes to take.



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When Might the Transfer Pathway Not be the Best Option?

If you plan to pursue a more difficult major like Engineering, then you may want to avoid transferring halfway through your college education. In particular, UW-Madison does not guarantee admission to engineering majors, and failing to meet the progression requirements upon transferring can set you back a semester or even a whole year, leading to a higher expense than planned. It is important to consider the average return on investment (ROI) for the major you want to pursue and factor that into your decision on whether the cost of attending a university for four years, rather than two, is worth it.

If you are at (or near) the top of your high school class and score well on the SAT/ACT, you might be surprised at the scholarships some colleges, namely UW-Madison, offer students like you. Public universities like to offer scholarships and other benefits to their high-achieving applicants to get them to come to their school over more prestigious schools they think those applicants will get into as well. These scholarships can make the cost of going to a university comparable to community college for high-achieving students, negating the need to go down the transfer pathway. You never know what you can be awarded until you apply!

What if I Want to Go Out of State for College?

If you want to go to college outside Wisconsin but cannot afford the corresponding out-of-state tuition costs at public universities, consider applying to only private colleges (especially ones that give good grant aid), Minnesota (for reciprocity), or the Midwest Student Exchange Program.

Where Can I Go to Get More Information?

This page lists the admission requirements for transfer students for all universities in the UW system: <https://go.wisconsin.edu/prepare-for-college/meet-your-admission-requirements/transfer/>