

Strengthening Humanities Transfer Pathways in Higher Education

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Gardner Institute Symposium

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Agenda




- Introductions
 - Get to know the group
 - Humanities course memory
- Background and Project Description
- Findings & Recommendations
- Discussion
- Q&A

Project Details

- 2-year project in partnership with MCCA
- Mixed methods
- Four disciplines of focus:
 - Communications
 - English
 - History
 - Theater



Research Goals

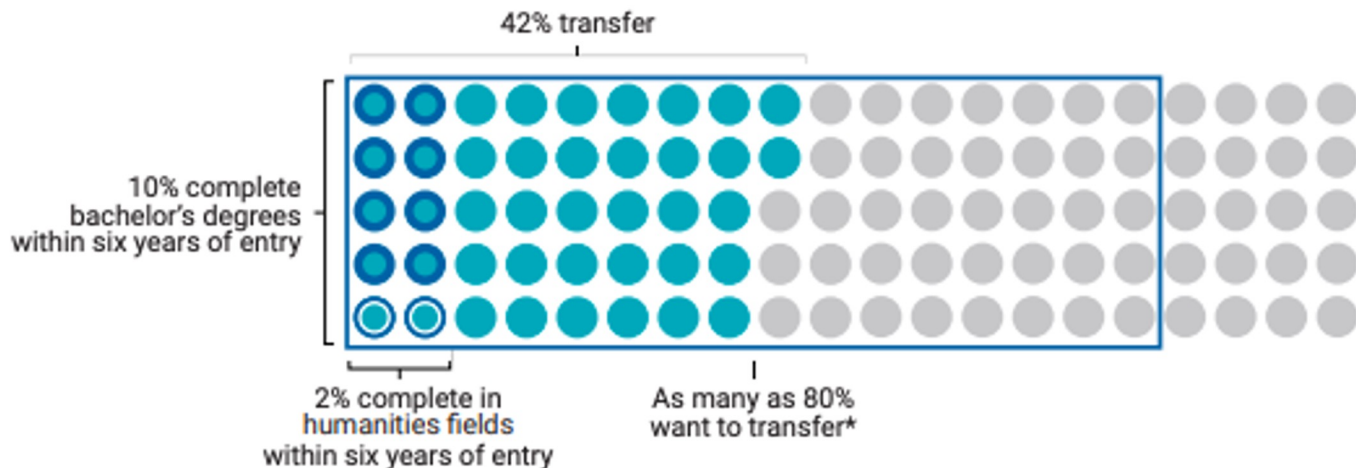
-  Understand current transfer pathways for students in the humanities, and identify ways to strengthen cross-sector transfer pathways.
-  Explore faculty and student perceptions of humanities curriculum and instruction across sectors.
-  Identify the course-taking patterns and progress indicators for students who enroll in humanities courses in community colleges.

Michigan State Context

- 31 public community colleges that serve ~30,000 new students each year
- More than 75 percent of community college students are transfer intending, but few wind up earning a BA, especially in the humanities
- 1 of only 4 states without centralized governing or coordinating boards for its community colleges
 - Relies on locally elected governing boards for each of its community colleges
- In 2020, the Strengthening MiHumanities project convened faculty and administrators from two- and four-year institutions to improve transfer pathways in the humanities and establish discipline “roadmaps”

How Well is Transfer Working?

Michigan Community College Transfer and Completion



Note. Michigan data are for the 2009-2014 entry cohorts. *Nationally representative survey data from the National Center for Education Statistics have indicated that 81% of entering community college students intend to complete a bachelor's degree or higher (Horn & Skomsvold, 2011, Table 1-A).

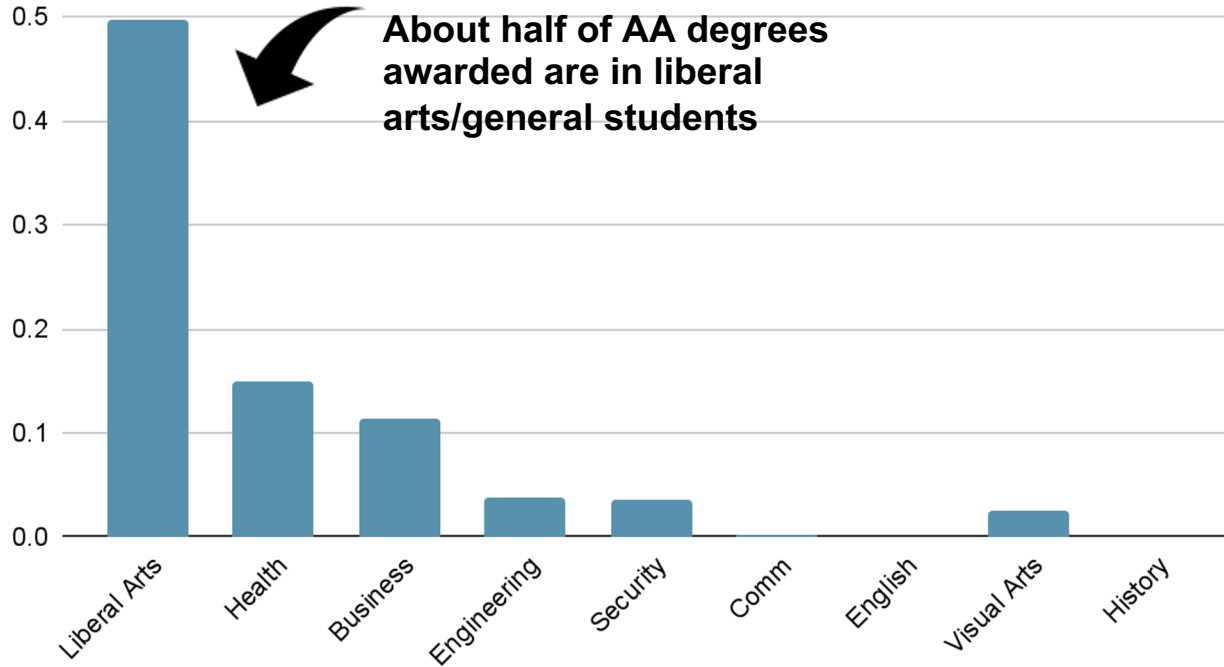
Excess Credits Among Michigan Transfer Students Who Complete Bachelor's Degrees in the Humanities



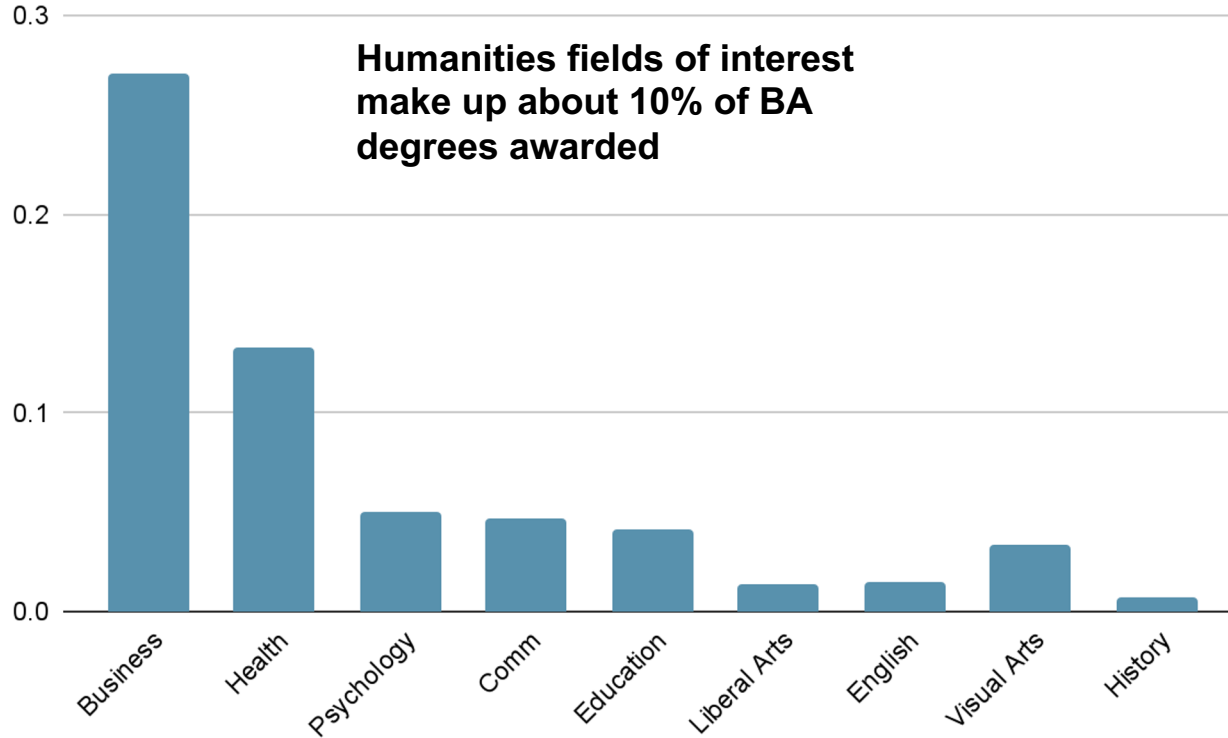
Note. Data are for 2009–2014 entry cohorts.

- Michigan community college students who do transfer and complete a bachelor's degree in the humanities accumulate an average of 20–35 excess credits
- Black and Hispanic bachelor's degree completers in the humanities take longer on average to complete their degrees and are also more likely to graduate with excess credits
- Repeat course-taking, lack of course transferability, and lack of advising support all contribute to excess credits

Which Associate Degrees Are Students Earning in MI?



Which BA Degrees Are CC Students Earning in MI?



Quick Takeaways

- Too few community college students transfer and complete bachelor's degrees
 - Among students who transfer and earn a BA, few do so in a humanities field
- Community college students who complete bachelor's degrees in the humanities accumulate upwards of 30 excess credits
- **Opportunity:** Despite relatively low completion rates and degrees earned in humanities fields, more than 80 percent of students who transferred to a four-year college completed at least 1 humanities course prior to transferring

Research Questions

- How can community colleges work with their partner institutions to create clear transfer pathways for students in the humanities?
- What information, including career guidance, do students receive about these programs? Why do students choose these programs?
- How can faculty at two- and four-year institutions work across sectors to identify learning outcomes, and instructional strategies for selected courses in humanities programs and implement approaches to enhance transfer success and degree attainment?

46 interviews

with faculty members, administrators, and staff

14 students

Shared their perspectives in focus groups

17 institutions

across the state of Michigan, from all sectors

Overshadowed and undervalued

Ramifications of being undervalued

- Declining institutional investment (in physical spaces, program-development, personnel)
- Fewer external funding opportunities
- Implicit and explicit diversion of students into other programs



Humanities diversion: who and why

Who

- Parents
- Advisors
- Students
- Institutions

Why

- Lack of knowledge
- Employment concerns
- Income concerns
- Clearer transfer pathways in other fields



“

We actually hear some sad things from those students when they tell us what they heard from our formal advising, because a lot of those conversations seem to try and steer students away from history. Our advisors understand teaching, but they don't understand other things like public history, or how you can use a history degree for really anything else.”

“

I don't want to go back to a time where only the most wealthy, privileged people in this country have the ability to study the humanities or history. But that's where we're heading right now, if we don't improve things.”

Cross-sector pathway challenges

Barriers to transfer pathway development

- Competitive student enrollment environment
- Current misalignment at course and program-level
- Faculty overwork, burnout, and role perception
- Ambivalence about building pathways in the humanities

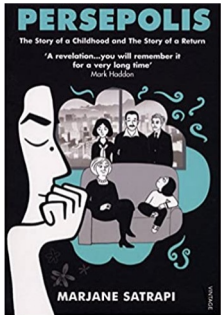


“

You can be the dragon and hoard your treasure as it slowly diminishes, or you can try and build some bridges and expand your territory and grow. We could all grow instead of all shrinking, as we hide inside our little medieval walls.”

Misalignment within and across sectors

- Lack of shared, common understandings of:
 - What constitutes the learning experience of a major
 - Upper-division vs. lower-division courses
 - Course learning objectives



“

Because what [UMD] may want is likely to be different than what [EMU] wants, maybe different than what [WSU] wants. And so then we have to try and build a course that hits the highlight areas that each of the partners wants while still maintaining sort of its own internal integrity. And that can be a real challenge.”

Challenges to faculty engagement in pathway development

- Building a cross-sector program pathway requires coordination and administrative support
- History, theater, and other humanities disciplines have very small numbers of full-time faculty
- Some community college humanities faculty are ambivalent about increasing the number of majors in their fields

Opportunities and bright spots

Humanities can connect students to college

- Humanities as a place for students to make a personal connection to the curriculum, explore self and society, think critically, and build communication skills
- Many students come to college with a passion for reading, art, music, writing, and other forms of creative expression
- Humanities courses may “warm up” students to college



Cross-sector, disciplinary relationships

- Can help speak to the value of humanities with one voice
- Can facilitate collaboration on curriculum updates (creating more inclusive and modern instructional approaches)
- Can work to identify and reduce redundancies and create differentiated programs

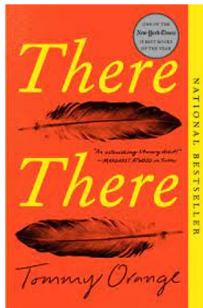


“

Do you need 15 journalism programs in a state when that job market is decreasing so rapidly? Maybe regionalize it somehow and then certain schools can work on other things.”

Career connections

- “Resume worthy” assignments
- Career-focused guest speakers on the relevance of a liberal arts education
- Experiential learning
- Expanding the reach of existing opportunities (e.g., honors curriculum, internships, service learning)



Recommendations for States & Intermediaries

Create opportunities for faculty from two- and four-year institutions to convene in like-discipline groups. Provide facilitation support to help faculty identify:

- Learning outcomes for the first two years to prepare students for transfer in the major
- Opportunities to develop regional partnerships and new programs to reduce redundancies and respond to student interests and labor market needs
- Strategies to collectively raise awareness of the benefits of taking courses and/or pursuing degrees in the humanities.

Recommendations for Institutions

1. Create coherence for students within the general studies/liberal arts degree program through pre-majors, concentrations, or other structures that create smaller and more specific academic communities
2. Ask every student about their interests, strengths, and aspirations and connect students interested in the humanities with major-specific mentoring, program specific advising, and opportunities for career exploration
3. Create applied learning opportunities inside and outside of class so that students see relevant and real-world benefits of studying the humanities
4. Invest in humanities departments through faculty hiring and other supports such that faculty have the necessary resources to carry out these recommendations

Discussion Questions

- Do you think the issues of cross-sector, cross-institutional misalignment are unique to humanities, or common across all disciplines?
- What are potential strengths or weaknesses of faculty-led design of transfer pathways in the humanities?
- When we think about “improving humanities education” in the context of guided pathways, what should be the goal?
- Which of these policy recommendations most resonates with you?
- Are there challenges for establishing transfer pathways in the humanities that we have not discussed?

Thanks!

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For more information please see our [Report](#) & [Infographic](#) published through the Community College Research Center.

Visit the [Strengthening MiHumanities](#) web page to view the roadmaps for Michigan colleges and universities.