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# Focus Group Data

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CWID – MICHIGAN

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# Value of an Associate's Degree

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## Utility in the labor market

- Opinions are mixed, often tied to discipline. When informed, students were surprised

## Positive academic benchmark

- Students' beliefs about their ability to readily finish a 4-year degree affects perception of the importance of the associate's degree as an important academic benchmark
- Those with more "complicated" life circumstances saw the value
- Some saw the degree as recognition of the ability to academically succeed

## Mixed messages about the value and importance

- From parents, teachers, counselors at the college/university. When messaging was more positive, students more inclined to value the degree
- Can't log the degree on most surveys asking for level of education, thereby sending message of limited value
- Early communication of the value was important, even before starting college

# Value of an Associate's Degree

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Understanding the difference between the MACRAO and an Associate's degree

- Easy to follow [and find] form for the MACRAO; Associate's degree requirements not as readily apparent
- Inconsistent communication about the relationship between the two
  - E.g., Could transfer with the MACRAO and often be one course shy of the Associate's
  - Perceived different emphasis on MACRAO or Associate's degree depending on individual advisor
- Students felt they were choosing between having a GPA when transferring individual courses (Associate's degree) or getting credit for more classes (MACRAO)

# Environmental considerations associated with pursuing college education

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Students expressed a desire for the university to be as accommodating of their schedules as the college

Some students felt overwhelmed by the size of the university

Nontraditional students said they felt more comfortable and welcome at the college than the university

Some students felt that professors at the university were more interested in their work and their students

One student expressed difficulty in affording food and feeling safe when traveling to and from school

# Transfer Cost/Benefit

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## Cost and cost benefit

- Costs of credit accumulation that doesn't transfer as expected, better understanding that leads to better decision making about which courses to take at which institution so there are fewer holes and fewer "repeats"
- Students are trying to save money when taking courses at the college, so often have enough credits for the associate's but don't realize it before transferring;
- When students transfer only a few credits short of an associate's, taking the last course(s) for the degree at university rates is less appealing
- "Reverse transfer" is not well understood

# Transfer - Process

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Importance of having counselors from both institutions talking together with students

Providing orientation specifically designed for transfer students led by someone who has transferred

## Process

- GPA – understanding the impact of entering the university without a transfer GPA on enrollment in some majors and upper division courses; when needed, helping students petition into these majors and courses more easily
- Paperwork – insuring student transcripts, degree confirmation, & MACRAO certification move efficiently between institutions and be recognized officially
- Ease or not – students vary in how they perceive the transfer process [easy----tedious----very challenging]

# Communication – Counselors Matter!

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Students reported mixed experiences with counselors.

Students felt meeting with counselors early in their academic career was important

- Counselor advising loads are often so high that getting appointments is hard
- Students sometimes felt university counselors were not as receptive to them as to native students
- Importance of talking about how to pursue degree/transfer as well as why
- Most students said their counselors did not tell them why an associate's would be valuable and focused on the MACRAO instead
- Need for consistent, accurate information across individuals and settings
- Desire to have more course and transfer planning based on specific transfer institution

# Communication – Ideas

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Bulletin board postings for jobs that require Associate's degrees

Seminars on whether to claim an Associate's degree

Communication with parents on the value of the Associate's

Emails, posters, flyers, packets, social media campaigns

Communication in high school

The university should show support for the Associate's degree



# Communication - Ideas

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Orientation lead by a transfer student

Communication from professors

More access to university personnel at the college

Mandatory orientation at the college

Online access to transfer information in one spot

Complete list of what will transfer for each school and major

# Recommendations

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Communicate the option to claim an Associate's degree

Communicate the value of an Associate's degree

Tie the degree more closely to the majors students are hoping to complete at the Bachelor's level