The Strengthening MiHumanities initiative, a partnership between the Michigan Community College Association (MCCA) and the Community College Research Center (CCRC), brought together faculty from community colleges and four-year institutions to explore issues related to strengthening pathways in the humanities and to develop roadmaps to build or strengthen pathways in each of the four selected disciplines of Communication, English, History, and Theater. Between October 2021 and 2022, MCCA hosted representatives from twenty-five community colleges and twenty-five bachelor’s degree-granting institutions for a series of workshops and conversations focused on the mechanics of transfer and the role of the humanities in the community college landscape. Researchers at CCRC analyzed data on course-taking patterns from the Michigan Education Research Institute (MERI) for students entering community colleges between 2009 and 2019 to support the faculty discussions.

Creating an English pathway was part of the original statewide MiTransfer Pathways plan which began in 2017. However, the diverse areas of focus for bachelor’s degree programs—ranging from literary history, genre studies, creative writing and composition, and rhetoric—made it difficult to identify a set of universally transferable lower-division courses. The role of first-year Composition, whether as a single course or a two-course sequence, also complicated faculty discussions. With the Michigan Transfer Agreement (MTA) requiring only one course in Composition, faculty were divided on whether a second Composition course should be part of the English pathway. Ultimately the effort to create the pathway was abandoned after 2018, with the issues and questions surrounding the role of Composition left unresolved.

For this project, representatives from twenty-five community colleges and twenty-five bachelor’s degree-granting institutions participated in the English discipline dialogues. In the ten years between 2009 and 2019, a total of 131,475 students transferred from a community college to a bachelor’s degree-granting institution, and 80,200 students completed one or more English courses before transfer. However, CCRC’s data analysis indicated that only 611 students eventually earned a BA in English after transferring from a community college between 2009 and 2015. The most common course was English Composition I, followed by English
In MiTransfer Pathways, students complete an associate degree at a participating community college that includes the MTA and selected MiTransfer Pathways courses that will apply to a program of study. Once students earn the associate degree, they can transfer to a participating university to complete the remaining bachelor’s degree requirements.

**Building MiTransfer Pathways**

In MiTransfer Pathways, students complete an associate degree at a participating community college that includes the MTA and selected MiTransfer Pathways courses that will apply to a program of study. Once students earn the associate degree, they can transfer to a participating university to complete the remaining bachelor’s degree requirements.

1. Conduct catalog research to identify common lower-division courses as potential candidates for pathway courses. These candidates should be courses that are either required, recommended, optional, or appropriate for students wishing to major in the discipline to complete in the first and second years at the community college.

2. Faculty from both two- and four-year institutions then narrow down the candidate courses to a set of three to nine foundational courses in the discipline that can be taught at participating community colleges and will transfer to participating universities.

3. Once faculty identify the set of common courses, institutions begin a process to ensure that all of the MiTransfer Pathways courses transfer as direct equivalents (e.g., PSY 101 = PSYCH 111) instead of as general, departmental, or elective credit (e.g., PSY 101 = PSYCH GEN). The equivalent courses are then recorded in a course equivalency database at MiTransfer.org.

**Discussion and Recommendations: Pathways to a Bachelor’s Degree in English and the Role of English within Pathways**

**Building a Pathway to English**

While building a statewide English pathway was not the goal of these dialogues, faculty reflection on the challenges that had come with previous efforts offered important insights for institutions willing to center students in pathway partnership efforts. The many variations of Composition II. That is not surprising, since one or more Composition courses are typically required as a general education component in most, if not all, associate degree programs in Michigan, including Business—the bachelor’s degree earned by 23% of community college transfers. The participating faculty agreed to focus on alignment and transferability of Composition I and II as a priority in the initiative. While there is work to be done to build a pathway for potential English majors, the number and variety of English programs across the state may require regional partnerships to be most effective rather than a statewide effort.
Recommendations for Institutions

1. Develop systems to track students who take multiple English courses. Analyzing the credit accumulation and completion patterns of students interested in English before and after transferring can help determine the viability of identifying partners to create pathways to literature studies, creative writing, rhetoric and composition, or teacher preparation. Include qualitative data such as student interviews to create a full picture.

2. Leverage regional proximity and widen the partnership lens to include private institutions to help thicken relationships with transfer partners and encourage receiving institutions to distinguish themselves by demonstrating their transfer-receptive culture to students. Data shows that private institutions are receiving large numbers of transfer students in Michigan, and they should be considered vital partners for community colleges.

Building English into the Pathways

Responses to a recent survey about the MTA distributed by the Michigan Transfer Steering Committee (TSC) suggest that Composition requirements across the state are not clearly understood by students or institutions. The MTA allows students to complete one course in English Composition and then to select either a second course in Composition or a Communication course to complete the general education package. The survey responses indicated that about one-third of students who complete the MTA elect a Communication course over a second English Composition course. However, the survey also indicated that most four-year institutions require or prefer that students complete two-lower division Composition courses to satisfy either general education or program-specific requirements. It is possible that many students who transfer with the MTA will find themselves having to take Composition II after transfer, potentially slowing their progress to a bachelor’s degree. Faculty participating in the
Recommendations for Institutions

1. Use common learning outcomes for Composition I and II to ensure that these courses transfer seamlessly among institutions participating in the MTA and can be fully applied to general education and program requirements to the extent possible.

2. Work internally to raise the profile of English Composition courses and create conditions for English faculty to persuade other programs to include writing instruction and assessment as a central component of program requirements. Institute or revive “writing across the curriculum” initiatives to emphasize the value of strong writing skills to employers across a range of disciplines.

3. Leverage faculty participation in disciplinary associations such as the National Council of Teachers of English's Conference on College Communication and Composition (CCCC) to build toward shared understanding and agreement among faculty of the core components and learning outcomes of the foundational courses in English Composition. Frame conversations about the challenges facing students through an equity lens, and work to center student interests in these disciplinary settings.

About Strengthening MiHumanities

Strengthening MiHumanities is a collaborative effort between the Michigan Center for Student Success and the Community College Research Center focused on strengthening transfer pathways in the humanities and on strengthening the humanities in program pathways. Funding for this work is generously provided by the Mellon Foundation. For more information about the project, including the roadmaps for Communication, English, History, and Theater, visit https://www.mcca.org/Strengthening-MiHumanities.