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. Representatives from nine community colleges and six bachelor’s degree-granting institutions participated in the History discipline discussions.

In the ten years between 2009 and 2019, 118,973 students at Michigan’s community colleges completed 421 different History courses. Most of the courses were titled with some variation of United States History or Western or World Civilization, but some also included African American History, Michigan History, and the occasional specialized courses in the History of Ireland, Russia, or Rock’n’Roll. During this time, 26% percent of students who transferred took at least one History course and 8% took two or more History courses while enrolled at a community college, while 14% took at least one History course after transferring and about 5% took two or more History courses at a four-year college. Of the students who transferred, 302 completed a bachelor’s degree in History.
Top History courses* taken at community colleges between 2009 and 2019.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community College History Courses</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>U.S. History to 1877</td>
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<tr>
<td>U.S. History after 1877</td>
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<tr>
<td>World Civilization</td>
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<tr>
<td>Western Civilization</td>
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<tr>
<td>Michigan History</td>
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*Ranking combines courses with similar titles suggesting equivalence

**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: Pathway to a Bachelor’s Degree in History and the Role of History within Pathways

Building a Pathway to History

History appears to be a comparatively easy discipline in which to build a traditional transfer pathway because of the relatively standard and generally linear way foundational courses in the discipline are organized. While most institutions have similar or similarly structured courses in early and later United States History and Western Civilization, the historical periods covered in these courses are different across institutions. When it comes to creating a seamless pathway in History, *Strengthening MiHumanities* participants identified the complicating factor of differing historical periods covered in foundational courses. Creating the conditions for faculty and departments to come to shared agreement across institutions about the outcomes and appropriate boundaries of historical periods covered in each foundational course is clearly the most important work to be done to smooth the pathway for transfer students who wish to major in History. The American Historical Association (AHA)’s Tuning the History Discipline project provides a strong point of departure for such collaborative work among faculty.

Recommendations for Institutions

1. Develop systems to understand how students who take foundational courses in History flow through your institution. Create course equivalency matrices in MiTransfer.org to determine transfer applicability for the courses. How many students who take the foundational courses transfer? Where do they transfer and what are the disaggregated baccalaureate completion rates for these students? How many of these students declare a History major or take additional History courses after transferring?

2. Assess the completion and credit accumulation patterns to determine the viability of a streamlined History pathway. Include qualitative data such as student interviews to create a full picture.

3. 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.

4. Use the AHA’s Tuning the History Discipline project as a touchstone for faculty dialogues that bring together two- and four-year faculty for the purpose of determining shared objectives for core courses and common historical periods covered in each of the foundational courses. Frame conversations about the challenges transfer students face through an equity lens, and work to center student interests in these disciplinary settings.
Building History into the Pathways

While establishing common historical periods covered in foundational survey courses is not an insurmountable challenge, faculty conversations surfaced an important question about whether this is the best approach to protecting the vital importance of History within the context of vertical transfer pathways. There are not enough full-time History faculty at community colleges to have a robust conversation about a History pathway. Further, there appears to be less faculty interest in this work than in the issue of finding ways to embed a broad range of History courses more effectively into a wider array of pathways. Many History faculty have a deep passion for their specialty courses, which some argue is an essential example of courses that “light the fire” for students. Accordingly, History faculty have expressed as much, if not more, interest in embedding History courses into a wide range of pathways than in the work of building a History transfer pathway.

Recommendations for Institutions

1. Track persistence and completion rates for community college students who take specialty History courses. What does the quantitative and qualitative data, including interviews with students, tell you about the “light the fire” potential of History courses within a wider range of pathways?

2. Ask faculty who teach courses in History to describe how their courses contribute to more densely populated pathways and create the conditions for History faculty to make the case to other programs for the inclusion of these courses as recommended electives for students in a wider range of disciplines.

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.