



Wheelhouse

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Associate Degrees for Transfer

A Snapshot of Progress Across California Community Colleges

CALIFORNIA'S THREE-TIERED SYSTEM of higher education, each with its own mission and purview, is designed to serve the varied and dynamic needs of California citizens. This structure has contributed to California's high rates of college enrollment, but it has also resulted in a number of challenges for the many BA-bound students that begin their studies at a community college. California Community Colleges (CCC) provide common lower-division coursework to prepare students for transfer to a California State University (CSU) or University of California (UC) campus. Prior to 2011, a cumbersome system of unique bilateral articulation agreements between individual CCCs and CSUs specific to each major produced a difficult transfer process for many students. This system resulted in numerous undesirable outcomes: many students never transferred; many students who did transfer did so without first earning an associate degree; and most successful transfer students accumulated far more credits at their CCC than necessary and then ended up repeating numerous lower division courses in their major at a CSU.

In an effort to improve outcomes, California Senate Bill 1440 created a new Associate Degree for Transfer (ADT) program, which in 2010 established a statewide framework for more seamless pathways between the CCCs and CSUs. The goal was to increase the rate of students who successfully transfer by establishing a defined set of classes that are similar at all CCCs and are accepted as lower division course work at all CSU campuses that offer the same degree. A student who successfully earns an ADT in a given major is guaranteed admission to the CSU system in that major with junior status, and the student will have to complete no more than two years of additional coursework to earn a bachelor's degree.

TOPLINES

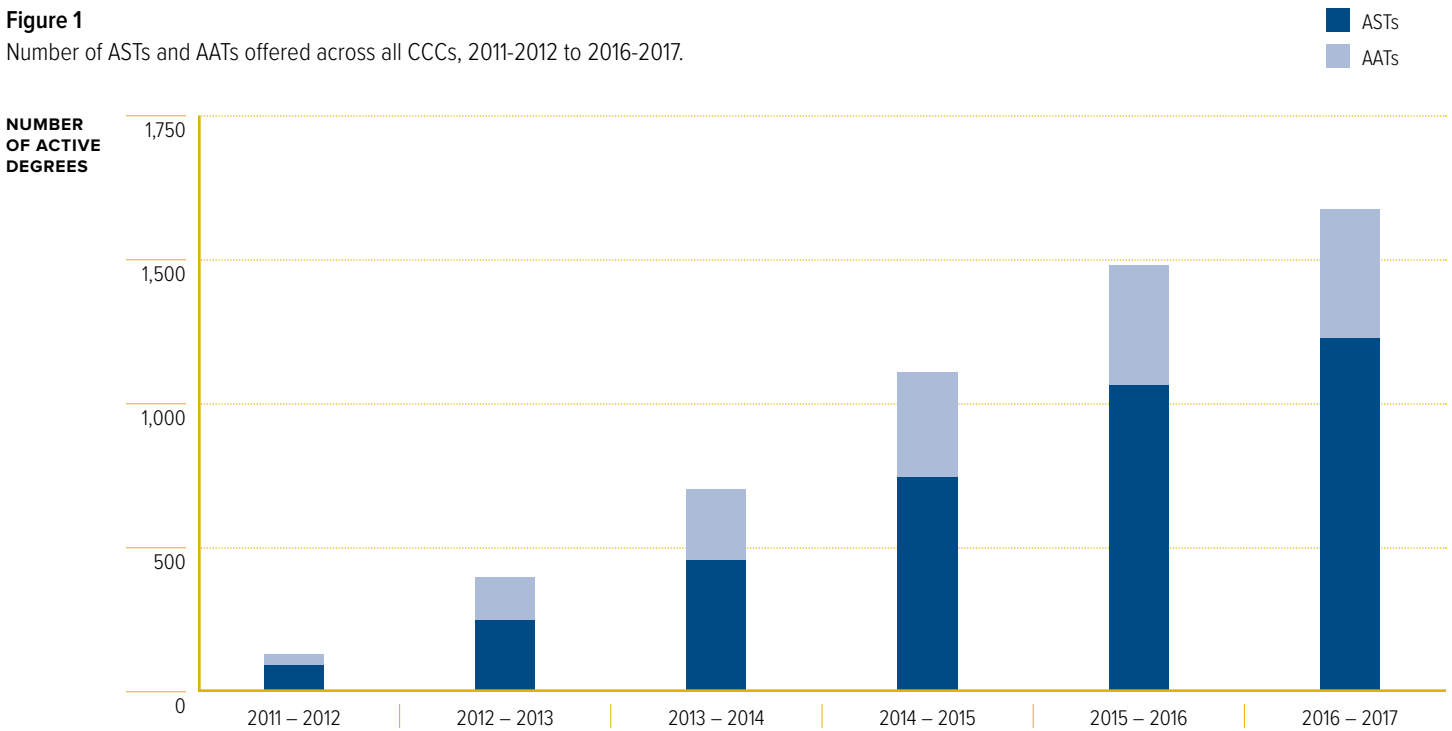
- > The growth in ADTs has been widespread across the CCC system, with the number of degrees earned growing almost fifty-fold to more than 35,000 from 2011 to 2017.
- > The average number of ADTs offered by campus has grown steadily, from one to 15 over the six-year period. There is significant variability by campus, however, in the number of ADTs offered.
- > Two-thirds of ADT-earners in 2015-16 transferred to a four-year university. While ADT-earners are not the only CCC students who transfer, they represent a growing proportion of those who do.
- > Early data indicate that ADTs lead to more efficient course taking by students.

The implementation of ADTs at California’s 114 community colleges is considered one of the most significant policy reforms in California higher education in decades. This is the second in an occasional series of briefs gauging the progress of the ADT program. This brief provides a snapshot of growth in the type and number of degrees, the demographics of students earning ADTs and their course-taking and transfer patterns at the six-year mark of implementation.

The growth of ADTs

The number of ADTs offered has grown steadily over the past six years. In the first year of implementation (2011-2012), 61 community colleges offered a total of 116 individual ADTs in six fields (Psychology, Sociology, Speech Communication, Mathematics, Administration of Justice and Child Development). Five years later, in the 2016-2017 school year, all 114 colleges offered nearly 1,700 individual ADTs in 35 fields. Figure 1 illustrates the growth in both Associate of Arts for Transfer (AA-Ts) and Associate of Science for Transfer degrees (AS-Ts).¹

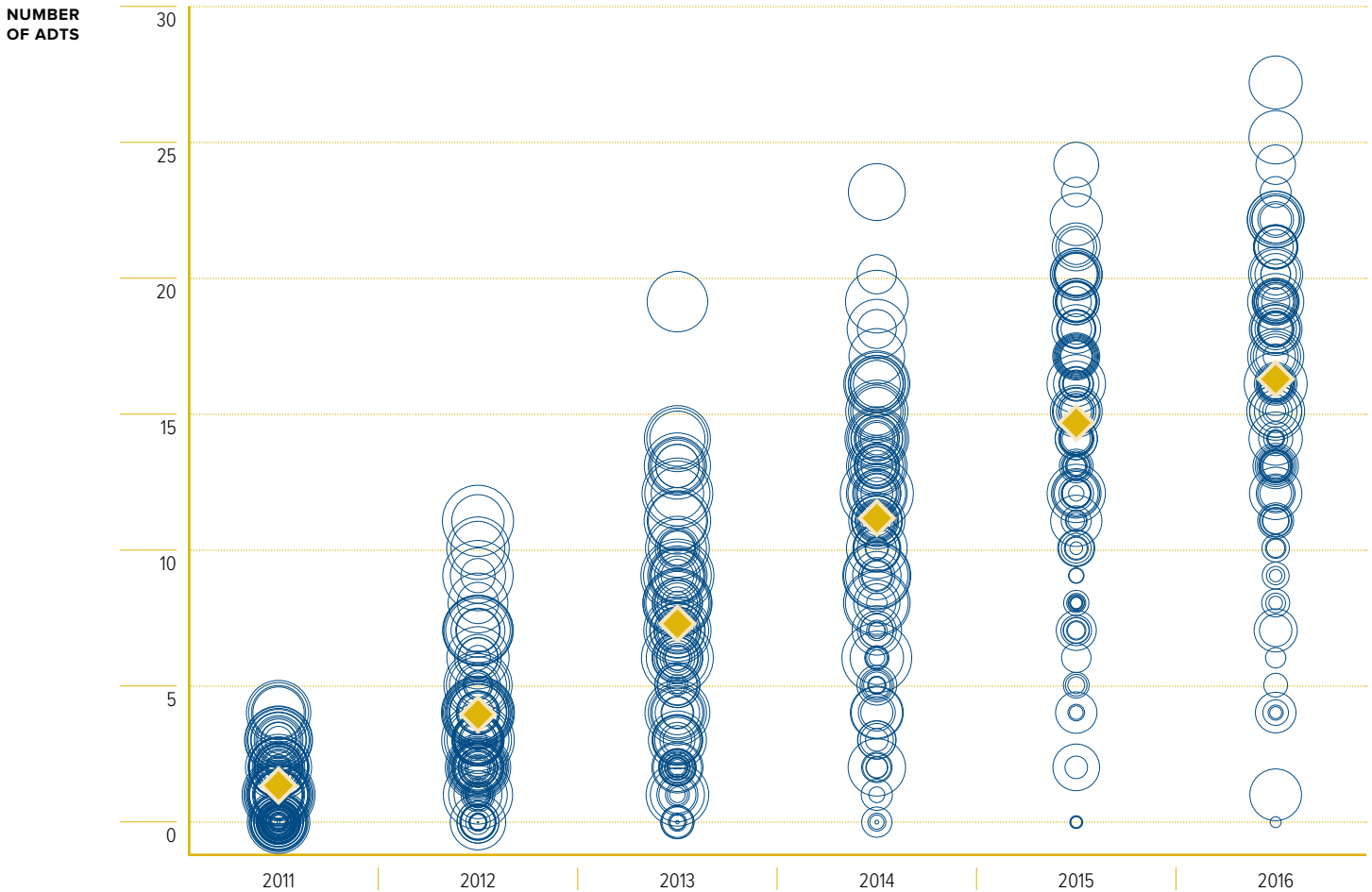
Figure 1
Number of ASTs and AATs offered across all CCCs, 2011-2012 to 2016-2017.



The growth in ADTs has been widespread across the CCC system, with a steady increase in the average number of ADTs offered by each campus. In 2011-2012, each college campus offered on average about one ADT; by 2016-2017, that number was more than 15 (shown by gold diamonds in Figure 2). However, this average masks considerable variability across the system. Figure 2 plots the number of ADTs offered at each CCC in a given year. In 2016-2017, some CCCs offered more than 25 ADTs while some offered none. The variability is not entirely explained by the size of the school (the size of the bubbles represent the size of the campus). Some very large schools (those that grant thousands of associate degrees each year) offered fewer than 5 ADTs in 2016-2017.

Figure 2

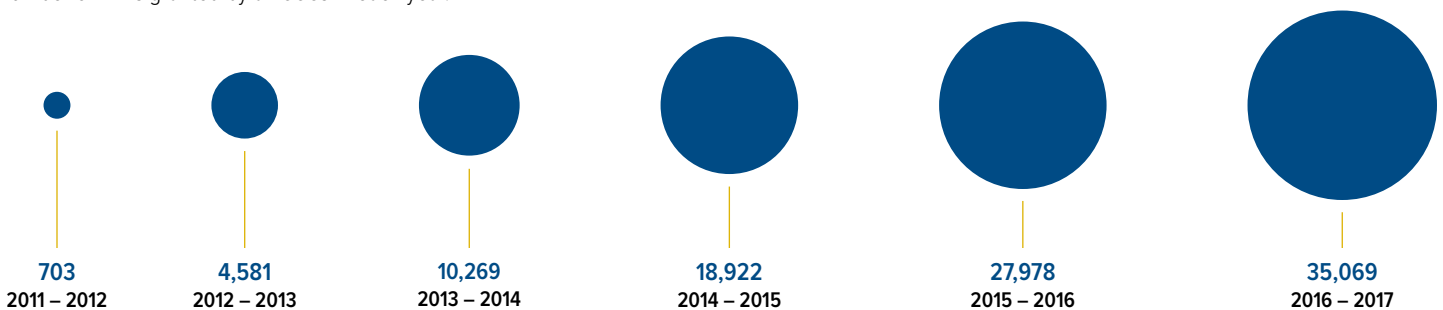
Number of ADTs offered by each CCC each year. Gold diamonds represent average across all CCCs each year and bubbles represent each college. The size of the bubbles represents the size of each college.



As the number of ADTs being offered has grown, so has the number of students earning ADTs. Figure 3 presents the overall number of ADTs granted each year since 2011-12. These graduates are not spread evenly across degree fields. For example, ADTs in Business Administration, Psychology, Speech Communication, Sociology and Administration of Justice combined account for more than two-thirds of all ADTs granted.

Figure 3

Number of ADTs granted by all CCCs in each year.

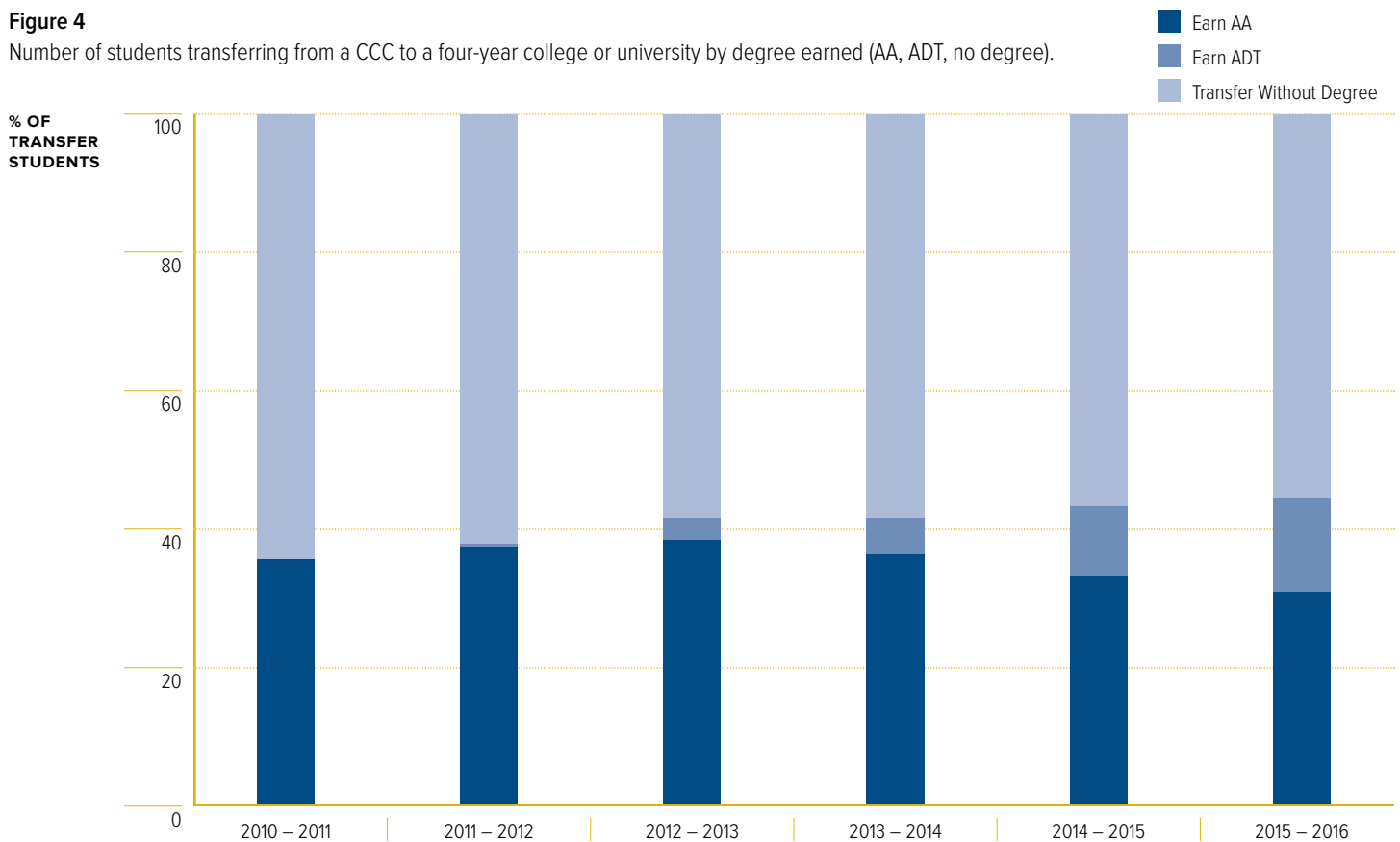


Consequently, students who have earned ADTs represent a growing proportion of all students who eventually transfer to a four-year school. Figure 4 shows the percent of students who transfer to any four-year institution by degree type (AA/AS, ADT, or no degree). In 2015-2016, about 15% of students who transferred to a four-year school had earned an ADT. This number has been growing steadily over time.

There are a number of possible explanations for the growth in students who transfer with an ADT. The ADTs may have motivated BA-bound students to obtain an associate degree while before they may have transferred without one. ADTs might have induced some students to transfer who otherwise would not have. Or, students who would have otherwise earned an AA/AS degree before transferring might decide to earn an ADT instead. Future analyses will allow us to examine each of these hypotheses, but early evidence suggests that all three of these explanations may be part of the story.

Figure 4

Number of students transferring from a CCC to a four-year college or university by degree earned (AA, ADT, no degree).



Who is earning ADTs?

Students who earn ADTs have a similar demographic profile to students who earn AAs (columns 2 and 3 of Table 1). They are younger, slightly more likely to be Hispanic, slightly less likely to be Black, and slightly less likely to be female. Across other demographic characteristics, ADT and AA earners are similar. Students who earn ADTs are much more likely to be Hispanic than students who transfer without first earning a degree (and less likely to be from every other racial/ethnic group, see columns 3 and 4 of Table 1). Students who earn ADTs are more likely to be female than students who transfer without a degree.

Table 1

Demographic characteristics of students who earned an AA/AS, ADT, or transferred without a degree in 2016-2017. “% BOG” refers to low-income students who received the Board of Governors fee waiver, which is now called the California College Promise Grant.

CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS, 2016-2017				
DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS	(1) All Enrolled Students	(2) Students Who Earned AA/AS	(3) Students Who Earned ADT	(4) Students Who Transferred w/o degree
% Hispanic	43.6	40.5	45.6	35.2
% Asian	11.6	10.3	11.0	14.1
% White	26.4	28.7	27.3	32.3
% Black	6.1	5.8	3.7	4.4
% Female	53.6	61.0	57.0	53.9
% Male	45.2	39.0	43.0	46.1
% BOG	47.7	70.6	69.7	65.8
Average Age	28.3	21.6	19.8	19.5
First Term GPA	2.70	3.05	3.01	3.00
Number of Students	2,376,409	94,327	35,069	58,311

Do they transfer?

Students who earn ADTs are very likely to transfer to a four-year college or university; about 70% of them do so. Of the students who transfer, about 80% attend a CSU and about 12% attend a UC. It is important to note that some students take several years to transfer once they have earned an ADT. Thus, the rate of transfer in a given year in Table 2 is not a cohort-based rate, rather the percent of all ADT-earners who transfer that year. This delay factor likely explains the somewhat lower transfer rates in the more recent years in Table 3. We expect the transfer rates from more recent years to increase over time.

Table 2

Percent of ADT earners who transfer and percent of those who transfer who attend a CSU.

PERCENTAGE OF ADT EARNERS	ACADEMIC YEAR				
	2011 – 2012	2012 – 2013	2013 – 2014	2014 – 2015	2015 – 2016
Percent of students who earned an ADT who transferred to any 4-year school	83.0%	79.1%	72.5%	70.4%	68.0%
Of these... Percent who transferred to a CSU	67.7%	78.9%	78.4%	78.7%	76.3%
Of these... Percent who transferred to a UC	21.1%	12.0%	12.0%	11.6%	14.3%

DATA FOR THIS BRIEF

Results for this brief are drawn from a rich dataset comprised of administrative records from the CCC Chancellor's Office (CCCCO), which include the census of all California community college students enrolled from 1992-2017 across the state's community college campuses. The data include detailed information on units earned, degrees earned, student transfers, and student and campus characteristics. Data on student transfers are collected by the CCCCCO from the National Student Clearinghouse.

Do these paths help students to be more efficient?

Early data indicate that ADTs are helping students to be more efficient in their course taking. When a department goes from not offering an ADT to offering an ADT, students tend to graduate with fewer units (4.5 fewer units, on average, which translates to 1 – 1.5 fewer courses) and having been enrolled for fewer terms (1.6 fewer, on average). This could be the result of many things: the types of students opting into departments that offer ADTs, general enrollment trends across all students during the past several years, or differences between departments and schools. Our future analyses will disentangle these various causes.

Future work

In addition to more deeply examining efficiency in course taking, and the growth in the number of students who transfer with an ADT, future analyses will examine the outcomes of students who earn ADTs once they transfer to four-year colleges, including CSUs. We will examine if students who earn ADTs are successful at earning BAs, and whether they are able to do so without accumulating excess credits, an important measure of efficiency for the system.

This brief was written by Rachel Baker, assistant professor of education at the University of California, Irvine; Elizabeth Friedmann, postdoctoral scholar at the University of California, Davis, School of Education; and Michal Kurlaender, professor of education at the University of California, Davis.

The research findings and analysis in this brief are those of the authors alone and do not necessarily represent the opinions of Wheelhouse funders or its board of advisors.

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¹ Some of the numbers in this brief do not perfectly match the figures put out by the CCC Chancellor's Office. The discrepancies are never large (at most 10%) and are due to some differences in accounting. For instance, in this brief we report the number of ADTs across the CCC system that produce graduates in any given year. That is, programs that are established but haven't yet graduated a student are not included in our statistics.

Wheelhouse: The Center for Community College Leadership and Research was established in 2016 to support California community college leaders through annual professional learning institutes and independent, actionable research on relevant topics and trends. Wheelhouse is supported by the University of California, Davis, the Institutional Effectiveness Partnership Initiative (California Community College Chancellor's Office), the James Irvine Foundation, the College Futures Foundation, the Evelyn and Walter Haas Jr. Fund, and the U.S. Department of Education, Institute for Education Sciences.