

Seamless Transfer/Core Curriculum: Impact on Public Higher Education

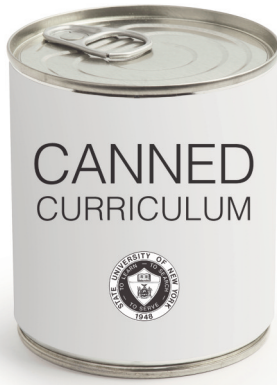
What is Seamless Transfer?

Seamless Transfer is SUNY's plan to facilitate student transfer from SUNY campuses that offer A.A. and A.S. degrees to SUNY baccalaureate programs by mandating a university-wide General Education program. The Seamless Transfer process has restrained faculty oversight of curriculum. It has developed in the context of a narrow focus on more rapid degree completion, without acknowledging the full set of factors that affect student completion patterns. It is connected to a broader agenda to streamline, increasingly privatize, and drain substantive content from public higher education programs.

What are some of the primary components of Seamless Transfer?

- Standardized acceptance of GE courses across SUNY community colleges and state-operated campuses
- 64-credit limit on associate degrees; 126-credit limit on bachelor's degrees
- Course availability for transferred students within a prescribed timeline
- Majors declared by students after 30 credits in two-year programs; after 60 credits in four-year programs
- Submission of required program changes by campuses before Dec. 1, 2014





Concerns About Seamless Transfer Plans

◆ **A SUNY-wide General Education curriculum threatens academic freedom and our ability to provide diverse educational experiences in tune with student needs and program specialties.**

Pressure to standardize curriculum threatens the academic freedom of educators who design courses in concert with their respective disciplines and fields.

It compromises SUNY's ability to offer students the diverse curriculum they need to be prepared for a dynamic and highly differentiated society.

◆ **Extensive curriculum standardization is not justified.**

While the goal of facilitating timely student completion of degrees is important, Seamless Transfer goes substantially beyond what is necessary to improve student completion rates. It is part of a broader set

of SUNY goals, most notably to standardize curriculum in order to facilitate increases in online courses with large student enrollments.

◆ **Seamless Transfer could lead to the further privatization of public education, which threatens educational quality and rigor.**

Many aspects of Seamless Transfer are aligned with the educational reform agenda funded by private interests, including the Lumina and Gates foundations. This agenda is supported by corporations such as Pearson and Coursera, which have positioned themselves to take over functions that are the purview of

public educators and public-service providers. "College completion" has been emphasized as the measure of an academic institution's success, with little concern for quality education or the need to prepare students for an economy and society that demand flexibility and broadly defined career readiness.

◆ **Seamless Transfer could weaken the curriculum, adversely affecting students from middle- and lower-income families.**

Seamless Transfer plans imply a "core curriculum"—similar to that imposed in K-12—that may compromise diverse educational objectives and standards. Faculty direction of curriculum is threatened, and more and more curriculum content decisions may be turned over to profit-seeking corporations, compromising academic standards.

A "core curriculum" at SUNY will further erode educational opportunities in terms of quality and flexibility to meet diverse student needs and broad educational and career objectives. If Seamless Transfer is fully implemented, standardization of college courses could weaken the curriculum and foster a more sharply tiered public higher education system.

◆ **Online courses may be imposed in areas where online delivery is not optimal.**

SUNY's Seamless Transfer objectives depend on the expansion of online education. SUNY is looking to online courses with high enrollments—not the hiring of additional teaching and support faculty—to meet new directives for course availability under specific time-lines. There is nothing to stop SUNY from expanding online education in ways that are not consistent with high-quality online course delivery. Private corporations

that create curriculum and online service delivery systems stand to benefit as “contracting out” for these functions becomes more feasible. This could lead to further privatization of SUNY's educational functions, with potential consequences such as additional cuts in courses, programs and services, and faculty, and an increase in the use of contracting out for the for-profit delivery of courses.

◆ **Seamless Transfer could lead to longer degree completion time.**

The neediest students are less likely to succeed in the streamlined process that Seamless Transfer creates. At the community college and four-year college levels, students' time to completion is affected by multiple factors. These include the need for remedial and “college success” course work, uncertainty regarding educational and career interests, changes in initial majors as

interests and career objectives develop, the desire to pursue more than one major and/or minors, internship and study abroad experiences that may alter completion paths, employment demands, and personal and family issues that affect course load and scheduling possibilities (especially for the increasing nontraditional student population).

◆ **Teaching and professional faculty have not been adequately consulted.**

Consultation has involved campus presidents, chief academic officers, and some faculty governance leaders and committees. The extent to which academics and professionals at the department level have been consulted varies across institutions. On most campuses, there has been little, if any,

campus-wide discussion and analysis of its implications. The Seamless Transfer process thus far has relied on top-down directives that present SUNY's plan as justified and inevitable. There has been very little analysis of its full implications.

◆ **Seamless Transfer runs counter to SUNY's mission.**

SUNY was never designed to be a homogenous institution across all campuses, nor is there justification for transforming its mission as dramatically as Seamless Transfer implies. SUNY's plans compromise its mission to “... provide the people of New York educational services of the highest quality ...” Course quality will be sacrificed in many cases as “cookie-cutter” curricular directives are imposed from above. Seamless Transfer plans

also contradict SUNY's mission that emphasizes diversity and providing educational services and activities through a system of “diverse campuses which shall have differentiated and designated missions designed to provide a comprehensive program of higher education, to meet the needs of both traditional and nontraditional students and to address local, regional and state needs and goals.”

Alternatives

UUP urges all of its members—especially those involved in campus governance and curriculum review processes—to demand open review of Seamless Transfer plans and their possible consequences. Campus dialogue is critical.

UUP pledges to work with our members, campus administrators, and SUNY officials to engage in a full and open review of ways to facilitate transfer of students from community colleges and colleges of

technology to baccalaureate programs at our campuses. Accurate information, transparency, and problem-solving—rather than radical surgery that will remove the heart of our educational institutions—is called for.

UUP will call on the chancellor to redirect SUNY to its essential educational mission and work with us to collaboratively address problems.



UUP Contact Information

Members can contact their UUP chapter office for additional information and follow-up or they can contact UUP's statewide vice presidents at 1-800-342-4206 or via email:

Vice President for Academics Jamie Dangler, jdangler@uupmail.org

Vice President for Professionals Philippe Abraham, pabraham@uupmail.org

SUNY's Seamless Transfer documents can be found at:

<http://www.suny.edu/provost/MTPSeamlessTransfer6-14-13.pdf>

http://www.suny.edu/provost/academic_affairs/SeamlessTransfer.cfm