

Making It Count:

Moving from Per-Class to Block Credit Validation in International Dual Degree Programs

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Tags

International Enrollment Management; Internationalization and Global Learning; Management and Operations; Partnerships; Program Design; Student Services; Technology; University/Higher Education

Setting

A large research university located in the United States offers several international undergraduate dual degree programs. All of the programs are based on the same template: students spend their first two years of college at the partner institution, and the last two at the American institution, earning two bachelor's degrees upon graduation. Students are considered to be fully enrolled at both institutions through the course of their four year program, and are jointly advised and managed throughout their time in the program.

Case

Since the inauguration of its first international dual degree program, students arriving to American Partner University (APU) in year three have had their previous coursework evaluated on a class-by-class basis by admissions team members, to determine which courses will be accepted as general transfer credit toward the American half of their degree program. APU welcomes many transfer students from around the world into its single degree program every semester, the majority of whom enter with prior university-level coursework. Any transfer student who enrolls at APU receives a transfer credit report which evaluates their previous coursework on a class-by-class basis for applicability toward their APU general degree requirements. The APU admissions team is well-versed in evaluating transfer credits from around the world, though these reports are time and labor intensive. The transfer credit report is used as a "hand off" document from the admissions team to the

academic advising team, so that the latter is aware of how many credits an entering student may be able to use toward the fulfillment of their APU degree requirements.

The transfer credit report is necessary to several administrative and enrollment processes. APU students must meet certain minimum credit threshold requirements before they can declare a major or be considered eligible to graduate. There are both timeline and tuition implications that can be impacted by the number of classes APU accepts from other universities.

However, because dual degree students exist in a liminal space for two years - no longer managed by the admissions office and not yet fully on-boarded into the APU experience by the academic advising team - the ongoing evaluation of their partner university transfer credits has been similarly transitional. As the programs have grown in both number and size over time, several convergent factors have made it clear to the APU international programs administration that a class-by-class evaluation is no longer a sustainable way to account for students' international coursework.

First, the sheer number of transfer credit evaluations needed has grown dramatically. When the first international program was launched a decade ago, there were 25 students in the inaugural class. Now, the same program admits approximately 100 students per year, and other dual degree programs are growing on a similar trajectory, and there are now over 500 students enrolled across all of APU's international dual degree programs. There are additional dual degree programs in development, which further compounds the need for a more sustainable transfer credit evaluation policy. Although new admissions team members are hired to support each additional dual degree program, the increase in student enrollment outpaces the admissions team's ability to evaluate transfer credits as quickly as necessary.

In addition, some partner universities' academic calendars differ greatly from APU's, which means that the transcript receipt timeline does not always align well with APU's admissions recruitment calendar. Transcripts are often shared by APU's international partners as admissions colleagues are traveling for recruitment activities around the world and cannot prioritize the transfer credit process. This results in transfer credit evaluations being delayed until after the fall recruitment cycle, and, in rare cases, after the entire admissions review process is completed in the spring. Delays in creating the transfer credit reports mean that by the time the academic advising team receives them, the advisors have done their own evaluation and documents are relatively useless.

A third, and equally important, consideration comes directly from dual degree students. The international programs team has learned that students often find the transfer credit report confusing and duplicative. Because their APU academic advisors are already helping them to understand how their international coursework will apply toward major and distribution requirements during individual meetings, it has become clear that the general transfer credit report they receive does not offer useful information related to completion of their remaining degree requirements.

In weighing all of these factors, the international programs leadership has decided to propose a shift away from a per-class evaluation to a block credit validation system. This change builds on previous block credit validation policies in place with two of APU's international partners, bringing both halves of the program into balance with one another and emphasizing equity between the partners.

Moving forward, international dual degree program students would automatically receive the equivalent of two years of transfer credits added to their student account at the start of their third year, based on their academic

experience at the partner university. While most of APU's partner institutions are not concerned with the details of how APU evaluates transfer credit, one partner does review the documentation annually as part of the program management process. In addition, the APU international programs team wants to ensure that this new policy meets the needs of all stakeholders - both within APU and for their partner universities - and decreases the amount of work needed to effectively transfer credits from each partner institution.

The APU international programs administrative team is now tasked with leading discussion of this idea and creating the necessary processes to put it into action.

Discussion Questions

As you consider this case, discuss:

- Are there other options that APU should consider aside from block credit transfer that might meet the growing need for a sustainable credit transfer policy?
- What are the next steps needed to enact this new policy?
- Which stakeholder teams should be involved in the future planning meetings needed to move this new policy forward?
- What are some potential future problem areas with this new process?
- What is the best way to involve APU's partner universities in the process redesign moving forward?