



# CREDIT

*when it's due*

# Arkansas



## STATE PROFILE

State Funder: The Kresge Foundation

### About Credit When It's Due

The Credit When It's Due (CWID) initiative is funded by six foundations and is supporting 15 states to develop reverse transfer programs and policies. Reverse transfer enables students to receive an associate's degree when students meet associate's degree requirements after transfer to a 4-year college or university.

### State Implementation Context

Arkansas' reverse transfer effort involves all 22 public community colleges and 11 public universities. Most Arkansas universities are authorized to confer the associate's degree, so reverse transfer implementation in Arkansas includes conferral of associate's degrees by community colleges and universities.

### Key Implementation Strategies

**Interagency Leadership and Steering Committee:** Reverse transfer implementation in Arkansas is led by a collaboration of agencies, including the Arkansas Department of Higher Education (ADHE), Arkansas Community Colleges (ACC), and the Arkansas Research Center (ARC). This interagency collaboration provides

leadership for many aspects of reverse transfer activities. In addition, a steering committee comprised of college and university student affairs officers, academic affairs officers, financial aid officers, and registrars was established early in the grant period to advise on the development and implementation of reverse transfer processes. The state formally launched reverse transfer in June 2013 to build awareness of reverse transfer and to communicate the value of an associate's degree more broadly. A press conference and kickoff luncheon was attended by more than 200 college and university representatives from across Arkansas, and press coverage included at least 20 local, state, and national media outlets.

**Pilot Strategy and Leveraging Existing Data Capacity.** The ARC hosts Arkansas' longitudinal database that includes all higher education data for public institutions, including course-level information. This robust database is key to the state's reverse transfer efforts and was leveraged to identify students who are candidates for reverse transfer as part of a pilot strategy. Focusing on a pilot cohort of students, ARC staff used the database and course equivalency information to identify students who completed all or most of the 16 to 17 courses that constitute the core associate's degree requirements. The centralized data at ARC provides for an efficient mechanism to unofficially audit degrees at the state level.

**Statewide Expansion and Launch.** The pilot strategy allowed Arkansas to test ARC's ability to accurately identify eligible students and allowed institutions to test reverse transfer processes before expanding to a larger group of students. Recognizing that all students, not just transfer students, may benefit from CWID, Arkansas expanded CWID efforts in Spring 2014 to any student enrolled at a public institution between 1994 and 2013 who completed at least 15 courses toward the associate's degree and had not earned a bachelor's (approximately 5,400 students). The state launched the expansion by targeting these 5,400 students through a comprehensive strategy designed to communicate the value of an associate's degree and obtain consent from the target audience for the exchange and review of transcripts. The state embarked upon an aggressive outreach campaign known as "Degree Matters" that utilized television, radio, social media, email, and a series of letters and postcards mailed directly to the target audience. A centralized, online consent portal was hosted on the "Degree Matters" website. Upon obtaining consent, the institution that awarded the majority of credits requested transcripts from other institutions and conducted a degree audit. All institutions followed a common protocol of communication to keep students informed of their status, including acknowledgement of consent and notice of the final outcome.

### Implementation Timeline

**Spring 2013:** The reverse transfer steering committees were convened to advise on program and policy development and implementation.

**June 2013:** A statewide press conference and luncheon launched the states' reverse transfer initiative.

**Fall 2013:** Arkansas contracted with a local firm to develop communication materials about reverse transfer and the value of an associate's degree.

**January 2014 – March 2014:** Universities and colleges conferred the first associate's degrees for the initial pilot cohort.

**Summer 2014:** ACC utilized AlumniFinder (a LexisNexis product) to obtain current mailing addresses for the statewide scale-up of reverse transfer. The "Degree Matters" communications campaign launched via television, radio, social media, email, and direct mail. Students began consenting to reverse transfer via the online portal. Colleges and universities began the process of collecting transcripts and conducting degree audits.

**Fall 2014:** Outreach concluded following a final round of letters sent through direct mail to the target audience. Colleges and universities provided monthly status reports to ACC.

**March 2015:** The online consent portal closed, and colleges and universities submitted final status reports.

**Ongoing:** ACC is in the process of evaluating the data collected and following-up with colleges and universities for clarification as needed. Efforts to communicate the value of an associate's degree will continue in summer 2015.



**Credentials awarded as of May 2015: 249**  
\*15 credentials were certificates

**Credential Type(s):** Associate of Arts, Associate of Science, Associate of Applied Science, Associate of General Studies, Associate of Arts in Teaching, Technical Certificate, Certificate of General Studies



# Credit When It's Due: Arkansas Profile



## Reverse Transfer Process

Based on a review of implementation across CWID states, OCCRL developed a framework for the reverse transfer process that consists of five broad processes, and Arkansas' pilot process is applied to this framework below. Arkansas' reverse transfer pilot process includes both state-level coordination and institutional-level decisions.

- 1. Student Identification:** The ARC staff query the ARC database and apply eligibility criteria to identify which students meet all or nearly all of the requirements for the associate's degree.
- 2. Consent:** A series of direct mail was sent to students educating them about the project and instructing them on how to consent.
- 3. Transcript Exchange:** There is no statewide standard on how to exchange transcripts, but most Arkansas institutions use the Standardization of Postsecondary Education Data Exchange (SPEEDE) server to exchange electronic transcript-level data.
- 4. Degree Audit:** The ARC performed an unofficial degree audit when it identified students, but it is the responsibility of the community college or university to verify the degree audit. If students consent to participate, the university sends the transcript data to the community college and the community college conducts the degree audit. Because most Arkansas public universities have the authority to confer the associate's degree, some students may qualify for an associate's degree at the university in which case the university corresponds directly with the student and audits the student's degree.
- 5. Degree Conferral and Advising:** Students who are within one or two courses of degree completion are contacted by the institution, and those students who meet all degree requirements are conferred a degree.

## Implementation Successes and Challenges

**Successes:** A key success for Arkansas is the high level of cooperation and buy-in from partner colleges and universities across the state. The collaborative spirit has certainly paved the way for ongoing reverse transfer efforts. Additionally, the communications campaign provided an opportunity to highlight the value of an associate's degree to the target audience as well as a broader statewide audience. Finally, the lessons learned from the initial pilot effort proved invaluable to the scaled-up effort. For example, challenges in the pilot included outdated mailing addresses and reliance upon paper consent forms. Utilizing AlumniFinder for current addresses and developing the online consent portal increased the overall success.

**Challenges:** The most significant implementation challenge was obtaining consent for the exchange and review of transcripts. After a massive outreach effort, 500 students consented via the online portal, a consent rate of only 9%. A second significant challenge is the manual nature of degree audits that universities or community colleges conduct. Many institutions do not have technology capacity to automate the degree audit process requiring additional human resources to process reverse transfer degree audits.

## Sustainability

A sustainable reverse transfer system is a logical next step to build upon Arkansas' existing transfer infrastructure. To accomplish this, Arkansas is considering several next steps. First, Arkansas intends to offer new students an option to consent (via the admissions application) to the future exchange and review of transcripts and the conferral of an associate's degree when eligible. Second, Arkansas hopes to maintain a statewide longitudinal data system in order to track students and flag them when they are close to an associate's degree, as well as notify the majority institution of this status in order to audit for eligibility. Finally, Arkansas intends to develop an annual schedule of reverse transfer activities to include an annual summer audit to identify students who are close to completion of an associate's degree, notification to majority institutions of these students, transcript exchange and degree audit, and a December deadline for reporting reverse transfer degrees to the state.

## Institutions Participating in Credit When It's Due

Arkansas Northeastern College	East Arkansas Community College	South Arkansas Community College	University of Arkansas at Little Rock
Arkansas State University - Beebe	Henderson State University	Southeast Arkansas College	University of Arkansas at Monticello
Arkansas State University - Jonesboro	Mid-South Community College	Southern Arkansas University - Magnolia	University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff
Arkansas State University - Mountain Home	National Park Community College	Southern Arkansas University - Tech	University of Arkansas for Medical Science
Arkansas State University - Newport	North Arkansas College	University of Arkansas Community College - Morrilton	University of Arkansas, Fayetteville
Arkansas Tech University	Northwest Arkansas Community College	University of Arkansas Community College at Batesville	University of Arkansas, Fort Smith
Black River Technical College	Ozarka College	University of Arkansas Community College at Hope	University of Central Arkansas
College of the Ouachitas	Phillips Community College /UA		
Cossatot Community College of the UA	Pulaski Technical College		
	Rich Mountain Community College		

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