

# DAVE MURPHY

State Representative • 56th Assembly District

**Assembly Committee on Colleges and Universities**

**Public Hearing, September 12, 2019**

**Assembly Bill 371**

**Testimony of State Representative Dave Murphy**

Madam Chair and members of the committee, thank you for hearing Assembly Bill 371 today.

Each year thousands of our Wisconsin college students transfer from one public college to another within our state. Many of those students quickly learn that they have to spend another semester, or more, to repeat the same course, and pay for it again, simply because it did not transfer. It's not just the student paying twice, taxpayers are also chipping in to cover this unnecessary duplication.

There are currently over 600 transfer students at UW–Madison alone and UW System estimates that there are over 600 “program articulation agreements” that they have negotiated in order to patch their broken system of transfer, like Band-Aids on a broken dam.

Improving college transfer is a critical and long overdue step to getting students the credentials they need and have worked hard to earn.

As a student at UW–Fox Valley I needed to transfer to get my real estate broker's license. We need to recognize the reality that sometimes students need to transfer in order to earn their credentials and our public colleges should be doing everything possible to make transfer as transparent and seamless as possible. We have a lot of adults in Wisconsin who haven't finished their degree or credential, as long as we keep transferring credits this difficult, I have no hope that we're going to fix that.

We also need to recognize the reality that vocational and baccalaureate learning naturally overlaps. There is an outdated section of statute put in place to prevent UW System and WTCS from teaching the same program without permission from the other.

While in the 1970s it may have been in the state's interest to ensure that welding and political science weren't being taught on the same campus, today we live in a world where innovation demands collaboration. In fact, UW System campuses regularly ignore the statutory mandate that they should not be expanding their “mission to include the preparation of persons for semiprofessional or skilled-trade occupations” while at the same time denying WTCS campuses from expanding their “collegiate transfer program offerings.”

Eliminating this already ignored section of statute will increase collaboration and allow students to determine where they can receive the best education, instead of maintaining artificial government barriers to innovation.

Our solution to the transfer problem is to require UW System and the Wisconsin Technical College System to implement a universal course numbering and transfer system within the next five years.

This is a flexible solution that respects the academic freedom of faculty and allows UW System and WTCS to design their own implementation plan. Unlike other states that have implemented credit transfer mandates, our plan does not specify courses or lock the colleges into a system that might not work down the line. It doesn't require that every course be taught at every campus. It simply recognizes the fact that every academic program taught at our public institutions is accredited by the same accrediting agency, so it's ridiculous that students cannot transfer from one campus to another with the same program and maintain the same earned credits.

Universal course numbering will not decrease academic quality—in fact, it will increase cross campus collaboration, allow for system-wide data collection on course demand and completion, and improve our ability to allocate resources to where they are needed most.

The timeframe is ambitious, but our students and colleges have been struggling with transfer since this system was founded nearly fifty years ago. In fact the five year timeframe was offered by our technical college leadership as what is realistically required to implement it.

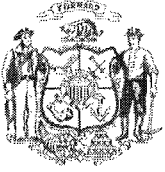
This is the concrete solution that creates real change for students and saves money and effort over time.

When I met with Governor Evers about this bill, he mentioned that he too was a transfer student and that it was long past time that we work together to fix this problematic and unnecessary problem.

Implementing this may incur upfront costs; however, I ask our colleges, why have you not made this investment already? Why instead have you invested millions into complex transfer agreements that aren't even utilized and transfer advisors who are necessary to help struggling students navigate the maze of credit transfer? The current cost, to students and colleges, to maintain the existing bureaucracy of credit transfer agreements is far more than the cost of implementing universal course numbering and transfer.

Instead of choosing the best, most affordable solution for students and the state, colleges have implemented overly complicated barriers to transfer, simply because it allows them to continue to avoid collaboration and defend the boundaries of each institution.

This is one of the many issues that merging UW System in the 1970s, nearly fifty years ago, was supposed to solve. I'm offering five years, an eternity in the eyes of students, for us to fix it.



**ANDRÉ JACQUE**

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*Testimony before the Assembly Committee on Colleges and Universities  
State Senator André Jacque  
September 12, 2019*

Chairman Murphy and Committee Members,

Thank you for holding this hearing on Assembly Bill 371, relating to uniform course numbering and the transfer of course credits among technical colleges and University of Wisconsin System schools, and eliminating certain restrictions on the respective educational roles of the University of Wisconsin System and the Technical College System. I am happy to join Rep. Murphy in bringing forward these sensible reforms.

Thousands of students transfer from public Wisconsin colleges to other public Wisconsin colleges every year to complete their degrees. Unfortunately, many students learn their journey to a degree will take longer than expected due to credits that won't transfer. UW System has been touting the importance of fixing their credit transfer problem **for nearly fifty years**, and yet the problem persists.

Seventeen states have imposed strict legislative solutions to ensure students and taxpayers aren't paying twice for the same classes. Although these solutions produced positive results, in Wisconsin we're proposing a flexible solution that allows our colleges and universities to determine the structure of credit transfer and course numbering that they will implement. This flexibility comes with a hard implementation deadline of five years. No student should be forced to take the same class over again simply because they transferred from one Wisconsin public college to another.

I am happy to note that Dr. Paul Carlsen, president of Lakeshore Technical College in the southern portion of my district, served as the chair of the council overseeing universal transfer in Louisiana, one of the 17 states previously mentioned. Dr. Carlsen has seen first-hand the positive impact that legislation like this has on improving student outcomes, and would be happy to share his expertise before and throughout the implementation process.

Just as critical, as requested by the Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS) including the board members and leadership of the technical colleges within my district, the bill also repeals the outdated 1972 requirement for the UW to seek approval from WTCS to offer new courses related to semiprofessional or skill based occupations and the requirement for WTCS to seek approval from the UW to offer new courses for collegiate transfer programs. These restrictions have unnecessarily hampered Wisconsin's ability to adapt educational programs to better serve students and industry, and lifting them will provide the opportunity for a significant expansion in dual enrollment courses available to high school students across the state and lower cost post-secondary credit options.

Thank you for your consideration of Assembly Bill 371.



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# Analysis of AB 371/SB 342: Universal Course Numbering and Mission Change

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Relating to: uniform course numbering and the transfer of course credits among technical colleges and University of Wisconsin System schools, and eliminating certain restrictions on the respective educational roles of the University of Wisconsin System and the Technical College System.

**Authors: Representative Murphy (R-Greenville) and Senator Jacque (R-DePere)**

## Overview:

This bill creates a universal course numbering system between UW System and Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS) that must be implemented within five years and include Early College Credit Program (ECCP) courses. It also eliminates the statutory distinction between the missions of the UW System and WTCS.

## Areas of Support:

- UW System supports the goal of making the transfer process easier and more transparent for students, which is demonstrated by the following examples:
  - UW System has over 600 program-to-program articulation agreements with other institutions and continues to add more.
  - UW System has gone above and beyond the Universal Credit Transfer Agreement (UCTA), which only requires 30 transfer credits.
  - UW System is investing significant resources to update the technology platform to make it mobile friendly so students can easily identify which courses are transferable.
  - UW System leadership is meeting regularly with leadership at the WTCS to identify additional areas for collaboration to improve the transfer process.
  - Our data indicate 70% of WTCS students transfer into the UW with 30 or more credits.

## Areas of Concern

- Transfer decisions should focus on content and learning outcomes.
- What are the fundamentals of efficient and effective transfer programs that should be focused on?
  - Faculty to faculty discussions and decisions must determine what can be transferred and what does not meet the requirements.
  - Good student advising is essential.
  - Articulation agreements require regular updating.
- Focusing on course-to-course credit transfer is inefficient. Rather, the focus should be on program articulation agreements, which take into account the entirety of the learning outcomes in a program and not just the learning outcomes within a single course.
- Course-to-course credit transfer may result in credits transferring, but not applying to a degree if they do not meet learning outcomes.
  - If too many credits transfer as electives that are not applicable to a student's degree, that student may encounter issues with financial aid credit limits.
- UW System and WTCS have fundamentally different missions, and eliminating the distinction between missions and educational roles will create duplication and costs to taxpayers.



**WISCONSIN**  
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

**Assembly Committee on Colleges & Universities—Assembly Bill 371**  
**Testimony provided by Steve Hahn**  
**Vice Provost for Enrollment Management**  
**University of Wisconsin-Madison**  
**September 12, 2019**

Chair Murphy & Members of the Assembly Committee on Colleges & Universities,

Thank you for the opportunity today to testify on Assembly Bill 371. My name is Steve Hahn and I am the Vice Provost for Enrollment Management at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. In this role, I oversee recruitment, admissions, and enrollment processes. My division incorporates the Offices of Admissions, Financial Aid and the Office of the Registrar.

While UW-Madison shares the same goals, as I'm sure do all members of this committee, of improving transferability and making the process easier for students and families, we do have concerns about the changes being proposed by Assembly Bill 371, in that the proposal has the potential to add bureaucracy and administrative burden, create large technical challenges, and require significant fiscal and human resources for our campus and our UW System campuses. But most importantly, it would not necessarily improve the transferability of courses that its language intends. Let me address transferability first.

*Transferability*

Every year, many students transfer many courses to UW-Madison. In 2018-19, almost 97,000 course credits were successfully transferred to UW-Madison. This includes almost 28,000 course credits for undergraduates who took courses at other UW System institutions and almost 16,000 course credits for undergraduates who took courses from WTCS institutions. The remaining 53,000 credits were for undergraduates who transferred credits from institutions outside these two systems. It should be evident from these figures that UW-Madison welcomes transfer credits. And, also, a common course numbering system would not affect the majority of courses transferred to UW-Madison. Most of these courses do not have and could not have the same number as the course the students took at another institution.

The course number is not a factor in determining the transferability of courses, and it would prove very difficult to give it this meaning. Course equivalency is determined by learning outcomes and topics covered in the course, the level of the course, and the number of credits in the course. Requiring a uniform system has the potential to negatively impact transferability, likely creating more confusion, as it could actually mislead students into thinking that certain courses would transfer when in fact they do not.

The system of course numbering needs to make sense in the context of what is taught at each institution, or even by some departments within an institution. For example, some course numbers are only used for graduate level courses; and, within departments, some use course numbers as indicators of areas. (History courses that start with 4 are American History courses at UW-Madison.) Attempting to implement common course numbers would likely cause discrepancies in the logic of these subject groups, proving even less clear for students.

#### *Added Bureaucracy & Administrative Burden*

UW-Madison alone has over 10,000 active courses on campus and makes about 800 course changes per year, including implementation of new courses; changes to existing courses (such as the course title, learning outcomes, credits, or prerequisites); and course *discontinuations* through governance processes. Under the requirements of the bill, a large and complex new system would need to be developed for administration and governance of a central, uniform course numbering scheme. This would create a unique administrative burden and require significant resources not only to implement but to coordinate daily between institutions, IT systems, and UW System. Almost every course would have to be reviewed to determine if it meets the criteria to be considered the “same course” as one at another institution. If it is determined to be the same course, then its number would likely need to be changed. But more importantly, the courses that are NOT the same as other courses (but have occupied that same number) would also have to be changed. Because each course number change requires modifications to systems that use course numbers, such as the transcript and degree audit systems, just to name two of very many, common course numbering would require an apparatus of almost constant review and updating on every campus and at UW System.

Course numbering touches almost every facet of the student’s digital experience and reporting in our IT system. The fiscal, human, and technical resources to retrofit all the systems and reporting across the UW System to implement such coding would create significant costs, be a multi-year endeavor, and would take away from other strategic priorities to provide superior service toward student success.

#### *New Course Evaluation Team*

But while we are not in favor of the particular approach identified in this proposed legislation, as I said earlier we can and do agree on the need for greater clarity and ease of credit transfer for our students. As more students bring more transfer credits to UW-Madison, we have taken steps to improve the processing time for transfer credit and communication about course transfer. The Division of Enrollment Management has developed a new Credit Evaluation Team within the Office of the Registrar. This new team’s primary mission is to (1) process transfer credit of all kinds, (2) maintain current systems and develop new automated technical solutions, (3) be the “forward face” of transfer credit evaluation for students, and (4) enhance on- and off-campus partnerships, *particularly* with UW System and its initiatives in this area. The mission of this office is to update, maintain and publicize true equivalencies between courses within our state and (where we know of them) outside Wisconsin. Implementation of common course numbering would by itself be unresponsive to the true need and divert all efforts to that purpose; this is an innovation that gets at and facilitates true transferability.

Again, I think we all share the goals of easing the course transfer process for students and families. Students have multiple options in the pursuit of their educational goals and recognition of transfer credit between these options will be a greater and greater need. For all of the educational choices our students make, both within and outside of Wisconsin, UW-Madison is committed to taking holistic steps toward addressing the parts of the credit evaluation process that can be challenging. We continue to welcome feedback on how we can improve, and I would be happy to take questions at this time.



UNIVERSITY of WISCONSIN  
**GREEN BAY**

Chairman Murphy and Committee Members –

My name is Michael Alexander, and I am the Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs at the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay. I am here today to give informational testimony on Assembly Bill 371.

UW-Green Bay and Northeast Wisconsin Technical College share an important partnership. The relationship is enshrined by a co-written charter called Crossing the Bridge. This charter charges each institution to work collaboratively to support our community and students seeking opportunities in higher education. We hold semi-annual meetings to track successes and create collaborations in academic programs.

We now have ten agreements in a wide array of discipline between the two institutions, with more in development. And we have numerous agreements with other technical colleges, including Northcentral Technical College, Fox Valley Technical College, Gateway Technical College, Lakeshore Technical College, Madison Area Technical College, Moraine Park Technical College, and the Wisconsin Technical College System. We hope to develop a similar relationship with the latter institution as we have with NWTC, a relationship that will be facilitated by the recent addition to UW Green Bay of the Marinette, Manitowoc, and Sheboygan branch campuses. We have agreements in programs like Business, Criminal Justice, Education, Health Information Management and Technology, General Studies, Graphic Design, Engineering Technology, Legal Studies, Lab Tech, Human Services, and Leadership Development.

To be sure this was not a simple task as decades of separation had sown seeds of distrust between the faculty of the two institutions. However, by building trust and collaboration, the seeds have been sown for a long-term partnership. We now do not see ourselves as competing institutions, but complementing institutions that have two completely separate missions to better serve the Northeast Wisconsin economy. We have heard numerous times this is the type of partnership needed to help Northeast Wisconsin succeed for decades to come.

True collaboration comes from trust developed by faculty determining what skills are being taught by the courses, rather than the bureaucratic numbers behind courses. Faculty at both UW-Green Bay and NWTC now collaborate and share resources and knowledge to better educate students at both institutions.

Northeast Wisconsin is proud of our strong relationship with NWTC, and community members in Manitowoc, Marinette, and Sheboygan are excited about the possibilities this type of close collaboration can bring with all of our partners at the Technical Colleges. We were able to execute this relationship because we are not constrained, we have the freedom to experiment with new programs, and we can ensure that learning outcomes in classes are aligned in addition to nomenclature of classes being consistent. As a result, we have been able to demonstrate to faculty the benefits of collaboration, rather than trying to force them into a relationship they may resent. This openness has generated a great deal of excitement and has led many faculty to begin developing new programs sharing the resources of both UW-Green Bay, NWTC, and others.

Thank you for your time. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.



**THE ACADEMIC STAFF PROFESSIONALS REPRESENTATION ORGANIZATION**

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DATE: September 12, 2019

TO: Members of the Assembly Committee on Colleges and Universities  
Representative Dave Murphy, Chairman

FROM: Kathi Kilgore, ASPRO Executive Director

RE: **Assembly Bill 371 – Uniform Course Numbering & Transfer of Course Credits**

The Academic Staff Professionals Representation Organization (ASPRO) is a UW system-wide, non-profit, professional organization representing academic staff and their interests. ASPRO is the only professional organization that represents the academic staff -- and only the academic staff -- of the entire UW System. The Academic Staff teach, conduct research, provide student services such as advising, and manage key University programs including admissions, financial aid, and the registrar's office.

We acknowledge the intention of Assembly Bill 371 is to address the frustrations many UW System students (and their families) face when transferring between institutions. However, ASPRO cannot support this legislation because it would require undue administrative burden and expense to implement.

Requiring a universal numbering system across all UW System and Technical College institutions would force an incredulous administrative undertaking. Making such changes would impact all academic materials and catalogues at all UW institutions and Wisconsin Technical Colleges and would involve reprogramming all electronic registration tools. This would divert resources, time, and money away from already stressed teaching and learning endeavors of the institutions. All levels of advisors from faculty to professional advisors would require retraining; thus, implementing this legislation would involve thousands of UW System and Technical College System employees across the state.

We recommend that the Technical College System and UW System conduct a survey on how current tools available to address transferring are working for both students and advisors, and then address any issues that are found. A universal course numbering system won't take away the need for these tools as there are often multiple courses that may count towards a course requirement.

ASPRO respectfully urges your opposition to AB 371. Thank you for your consideration.



**Wisconsin Assembly Hearing on AB 371**  
**Testimony of Glen R. Schwalbach, P.E.**  
**September 12, 2019**

Thank you for holding this hearing. I am Glen R. Schwalbach. I reside at 1090 Moonriver Dr. in the Town of Rockland, Brown County. I got my first two years of pre-engineering at the UW-Fox Valley Center in Menasha. Then I transferred seamlessly to UW-Madison for two and one-half years to get my B.S. degree in Mechanical Engineering. I got my Masters in Business Administration at UW-Oshkosh for which some of my credits transferred from UW-Madison. This was in the late-1960's and mid-1970's. So, transferability was important for me and was possible way back then.

What also was important was that these programs were duly accredited and met high standards for academic achievement. The baccalaureate education was financed by me and the masters was eighty per cent paid by my employer. It was extremely important that I and my employer got what we were paying for, that is, challenging programs that would prepare me for the challenges of our business.

I also have attended technical college programs and was involved in developing the first gas distribution course in Wisconsin which is now an associate degree program at our technical college.

When I first saw this bill, I wondered what is behind this. The purpose may be to increase options at lower costs but what are the unintended consequences. Are we not recognizing the important need for institutions that provide associate degrees and others that provide the baccalaureate degrees and that differentiation between the two is essential? Are we going to make it harder for students to chose the correct education path to fit their career goals? Are we going to reduce all higher education to the least common denominator? Will we actually increase costs because each institution has to accommodate more options, add to administration efforts, and have academic staff on the road? If the mandates of the law are met, will the quality of higher education go down in Wisconsin?

As with most bills that come out, I checked the American Legislative Exchange Council's and the National Conference of State Legislatures' websites to see if the proposal started there. Sure enough, on NCSL's website was a paper from 2013 which laid out objectives of this bill. As with most proposals or resolutions from these groups, the elements are general in nature and are not necessarily compatible with the uniqueness of each state. In this case, Wisconsin has a solid system of UW centers for the first two years of their four-year programs. So, Wisconsin already provides more flexibility and transferability than other states.

But, flexibility for students, who inevitably change their minds about their education paths, is a good thing. So, legislation that allows for smoother transfer of achieved credits between institutions is helpful as long as that legislation recognizes by specific reference that programs must meet academic standards or accreditation appropriate for the field and that students can be required to take national standardized testing to verify that they are prepared to transfer into a more rigorous program. This testing is for the benefit of the students. Otherwise, the students may be set to fail after they spend their money. This latter requirement is noted in NCSL's paper.

The bill could also make it clear that Wisconsin schools accept out-of-state credits as appropriate. Recently, a family member had credits achieved at the University of Minnesota rejected by one of our technical colleges.

Thank you.

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