



Friday  
FACTOID

## From Reverse Transfer to Degree Recovery

INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCHERS:  
*Bridging the Gap Between Data and Decisions*

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IR officers may recall the birth of the descriptive “reverse transfer” from the (unfortunately) late Barbara Townshend of the University of Missouri in 1999. In an era of dawning consciousness-of-attendance patterns as a major factor in postsecondary analyses, “reverse transfer” described students who began their postsecondary careers in four-year colleges and subsequently moved to a two-year college. That definition carried enough authority that it became ensconced as a variable in NCES data sets (such as the NELS 88-2000), in a mass of literature on attendance patterns, and in the **National Student Clearinghouse** 2012 signature report devoted to the topic. It continues to be in use today.

With the subsequent explosion of college completion projects in recent years, reverse transfer has been used to indicate a very different population and process: **resident four-year college students who had transferred from community colleges without associate’s degrees but who had accumulated enough credits to send back to their initial two-year institutions for both evaluation and, if added to prior community college credits, to result in the retroactive award of an associate’s degree.** In that way, if students dropped out of the four-year school they would not leave higher education empty-handed. Over the past three years, in particular, many adopted this implicit definition, including state legislatures, ECS, the SHEEOs, and national higher education associations. After all, it produced degrees among the enrolled.

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