Transfer Your Way to CPA

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO
Transferring to a Four-Year Accounting Program

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That tiny speck? It's your future. And it's bigger than you think.

LOOKING BEYOND COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Students choose community colleges for various reasons. Finances, academics, the desire to stay closer to home and family obligations can all make community college the best first step. As an accounting student, your next step will be to transfer to a four-year institution where you can make your dream of becoming a CPA a reality. Sound scary and overwhelming? It doesn't have to be.

Use this pocket guide to help keep you on track and help you be sure you're taking all the right steps toward the next stage in your educational journey.

Get Involved

Contact your state's CPA association and become a member of the American Institute of CPAs (AICPA). Getting involved with your local and national organization is a good way to get to know successful CPAs and take advantage of the opportunity to network with them. The AICPA offers college students a FREE Student Affiliate Membership at ThisWayToCPA.com/Sign-Up, so become a member today!

Timing is everything. Pace yourself.

WHEN SHOULD I TRANSFER?

While we encourage transferring to a four-year institution, choosing the best time to transfer is just as important. How do you know when you're ready? Here are some things to keep in mind when deciding if it's time to take the next step:

Complete Your Associate's Degree

Research shows that those who obtain their associate's degree before going on to a four-year school are more likely to graduate with a bachelor's degree or higher. With your associate's degree, you could even begin working at a small office, which will give you an opportunity to learn about accounting firsthand.

Shop Around

Understand your transfer options by taking time to research the various schools in your area (or outside of your state). Visit with accounting department heads and even sit in on a class if permitted to determine if a particular school is the right fit for you.

Plan Ahead

Knowing your long-term goals will help in planning your roadmap. If transferring is your goal, taking courses that will be accepted is key to an effective transition.

Understand What Transfers

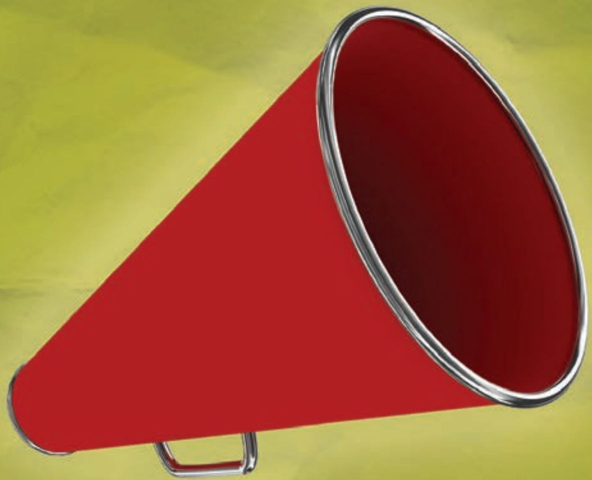
It's important to decide to which four-year school you'd like to transfer, so you can ensure the courses you take will transfer to that school. If you decide not to obtain your associate's degree before transferring, you may not get credit for classes you've already taken.

Stay Focused

It's easy to get frustrated, and sometimes you may even feel defeated. Don't! It's natural to feel overwhelmed by the whole process. Just remember to keep your end goal in mind.

Explore Your Options

Research CPA career options and types of CPA roles/industries that may not be discussed in class. There's much to learn, so don't simply rely on your professors to teach you everything. Take it upon yourself to spend some time online and find out as much as possible about the industries you find most interesting. Find out more at ThisWayToCPA.com/MyFit.



Wakey wakey! The next moves are on you.

TRANSFER 101

There are some basic transferring “rules” that you don’t want to overlook. And timing is everything, so break out your calendar and start planning for your transfer now.

4-6 semesters before transfer date

- Speak to a transfer counselor.
- Review your school’s articulation agreement. Articulation agreements typically either guarantee that the associate’s

degree will satisfy all freshman and sophomore general education requirements at the four-year university or will specify a list of courses that will be treated as equivalents.

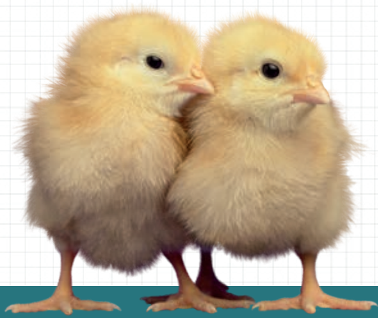
- ✓ Research transfer guides specific to your major.
- ✓ Learn about the general education requirements.
- ✓ Look for scholarship and grant opportunities.
- ✓ Familiarize yourself with colleges and universities in your area and verify their accreditation to make sure they are recognized in the educational community and by the public. Accreditation also qualifies institutions and enrolled students for access to federal funds to support teaching, research and student financial aid.

3 semesters before graduation

- ✓ Decide which institution will be your next academic home.
- ✓ Check out **ThisWayToCPA.com/Colleges** to find accredited schools in your area.
- ✓ If requested, complete a letter of intent for your selected school.
- ✓ Obtain letters of recommendation from professors and/or connections you may have in the accounting profession.
- ✓ Look into any deadlines for applications, transcripts, etc. Review your school's articulation agreement with the school of your choice.

2 semesters before graduation

- ✓ Complete courses that will be accepted to your new school's curriculum.
- ✓ Submit your admission and financial aid application as well as all official transcripts.
- ✓ Verify there are no financial or administrative holds on your student record at your current institution. (This could slow down your transfer process significantly).



Get Advice

Make an appointment with your advisor to help you compare your current curriculum with that of the four-year school of your choice. If you're having trouble understanding what's expected or how to execute your plan, he or she is the best person to steer you in the right direction.

History of Polka probably won’t transfer. Sorry.

ALL ACCOUNTING CLASSES ARE NOT CREATED EQUAL

Though they cover the same topics, some courses are named differently depending on the school and that can make things a little confusing. Does your school’s *Principles of Accounting* class meet the requirements of their school’s *Principles of Accounting*? Do they even have *Principles of Accounting*? These are the type of questions you should be asking yourself and researching before taking the next step.

Also, keep in mind that eligible transfer credits are usually limited to courses taken during freshman and sophomore years. In order for credits to be accepted, you must maintain a grade of "C" or higher in all accounting courses. If you take any elective courses during your first couple of years, select general elective courses that are accepted at most four-year institutions. Save the specialized courses until after you've transferred.

When selecting courses to take while at community college, it may be tempting to register for harder courses with the perception that taking them there will make them easier. This is not necessarily true, and even if it is, taking the easier road could mean being behind the curve compared to the other students who took the same class at a four-year institution.

Discover Differences

Cross-reference your current course descriptions with your desired school's descriptions. Bring up any differences to your community college professors and explore ways to incorporate elements that will help better prepare you for the elevated curriculum.

No trust fund? No problem.

FINANCING YOUR INVESTMENT

Any financially savvy student wants to leave school with as little debt as possible, but with ever-rising tuition costs it's becoming increasingly tough to manage. Don't worry! There are many ways to lessen the financial burden—just do your research and be aware of any scam or private loans that come with hefty fees.

Student Loans

Fill out a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) to find out if you are eligible for any subsidized or unsubsidized loans, a

Federal Pell Grant, or other aid available in your state. Based on your Expected Family Contribution (EFC), you may be responsible for very little of the costs associated with attending your college or university of choice. Be sure you understand your financial aid package before signing and accepting any loans. Once you have agreed to a package, you are committing to what could be a lifetime of debt beginning six months post-graduation. If you have questions about your package, ask! Your school's financial aid department will have a hard copy FAFSA form you can fill out, or you can visit FAFSA.ed.gov and complete an electronic application.

Scholarships and Grants

Most students begin and end their financial assistance plan with the FAFSA; don't make that mistake! Take some extra time and do your research on scholarships and grants that may be available to you. There are also transfer scholarships available. Contrary to what most students think, you don't have to be a straight-A student to be eligible for local scholarships and grants. Many scholarship opportunities are based on volunteerism, community service or religious affiliation. You may have to submit an essay to be considered, but it could mean the difference between taking out an extra loan or not having any out of pocket expenses at all. Check with your state's CPA association and the AICPA for additional scholarships available exclusively for accounting students. Hint, hint. Start at ThisWayToCPA.com/ALS for the AICPA Legacy Scholarship.

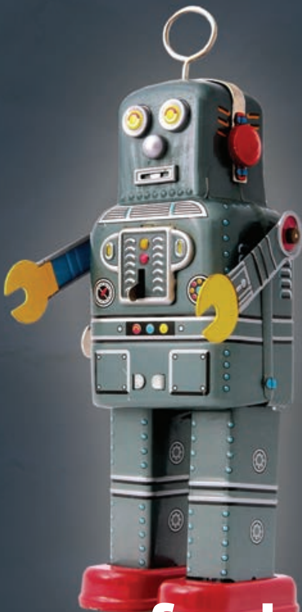
Do A Financial Audit

Have you already taken out loans? If so, how much? Understand what going to a four-year school will cost by forecasting your loan debt and repayment options. Be aware of how much debt you'll be in (or not) after graduating. Investigate opportunities to apply for scholarships that don't have to be repaid. Search for the right scholarship to fit your needs with ThisWayToCPA's National Scholarship Search at ThisWayToCPA.com/FindScholarships.

Government Loans

Stafford loans and GI Bills are examples of government assistance. Typically, these loans have a much lower interest rate, making repayment terms more manageable when it comes time to start paying back the loan. Similar to any other loan you may receive, repayment begins six months after graduation.

Before taking out any loans, be sure to ask parents and/or guardians whether any type of savings accounts, such as a 529 Plan, has been established for your education. This may help you save some money and keep your loan amount minimal. Also, keep in mind that if at any time you decide to stop going to school, even if you do not earn a degree, you will be responsible to pay for any loans or government assistance you receive during the time of your enrollment. It's important to not take out more money than you need. While it may be nice to have a little extra cash, you could regret it later on when it's time to start making payments on your loans.



If you feel like a glitch in the system, give it some time.

AVOIDING TRANSFER SHOCK

It's important not to underestimate how different a four-year school can and will be. Each college has its own atmosphere and can be vastly different in its level of academia. Upper-level courses are likely to require more study time than those introductory courses you've been used to. Plan to spend two hours studying for every one hour you spend in class. For a full course load, it's possible you'll need to change your approach to studying.

Take more notes in class; don't just read, but also reflect upon new concepts and take some time to explore them. Advanced courses may also include longer and different types of tests, papers and presentations that require additional time outside of studying. Some final grades may depend upon just two exams—a midterm and a cumulative final. In junior and senior level courses, professors aim to prepare you for your future career or graduate work, so be prepared to think more analytically, to learn more independently and to be asked to demonstrate your knowledge.

Faculty may seem more or less formal and can have different teaching techniques than you're used to, but the goals of successful teaching and learning are the same.

Tips for a seamless transfer:

Visit the campus.

Walking around campus and talking to current students and professors is one of the best ways to find out if your school of choice will work for you. Don't just go once; visit multiple times if your schedule allows and get a good feel for the campus and how you might fit there.

Get to know the accounting department.

Introducing yourself to your future instructors is a good way to get a head start on building valuable relationships with those you'll be in constant contact with. Ask if you can sit in on a class. This will help you gauge their level of academic intensity.

Meet with their advising counselor.

Go ahead and make an appointment with an academic advisor at your desired school. Let them know your accounting plans and ask them to share the school's academic catalog.

Explore multiple schools.

Don't limit yourself to just one choice. Investigate the different options you have and make a list to help you decide which school fits your personality.

Attend orientation.

Once you've decided on which school is the best fit for you (academically and financially), attend orientation. It's here that you'll get valuable information on the incoming class, dorms, cafeteria food and so much more.

Talk to students.

Get an idea of what to expect by speaking with students in the accounting department. Peer-to-peer recommendations are sometimes the best way to get a better idea of what to anticipate.

So, are we there yet?

TRACKING YOUR PROGRESS

We all like to think we've got everything under control and don't need reminders, but the truth is sometimes we do. It's helpful to see how well you're progressing during this time. It serves as encouragement that you're headed in the right direction.

As your transfer journey begins and ends, refer back to this guide as well as the points that follow.

First year at a community college

- ✓ Enroll in general courses that will be accepted as transfer credits.
- ✓ Focus on classes and avoid adding any extracurricular activities.
- ✓ Research the CPA firms in your area and find ways to interact with members of those firms.
- ✓ Keep a consistent line of communication with your professors and be sure to express any concerns immediately.
- ✓ Begin exploring four-year colleges and universities as transfer options.
- ✓ Seek summer internship opportunities that will give you insights into the accounting field.
- ✓ Become an AICPA Student Affiliate Member and utilize the information and resources available through the AICPA's websites ThisWayToCPA.com and AICPA.org.

Second year at a community college

- ✓ Remain in contact with your advisor. Be sure to communicate your plans and visions for your transfer experience, so he or she can help keep you on track.
- ✓ Update your résumé with any summer activities and continue to actively pursue networking and internship opportunities in accounting.
- ✓ Find campus activities to involve yourself in. Make sure they're significant activities that pertain to the accounting field to help bolster your application to the four-year school of your choice.

- ✓ Contact your state's CPA association; check with the financial aid office at your community college and the financial aid office of your future four-year school; check ThisWayToCPA.com; and consider the Teachers of Accounting at Two-Year Colleges (TACTYC.org) as another resource.

Meet A Pro

Invite a CPA to lunch or dinner. How do you find a CPA? Reach out to your local CPA society or tap your personal network to connect with someone who knows a CPA willing to sit down with you and discuss his or her career. Compile a list of questions that will help you gain better insight into his or her specific accounting role. Be sure to bring a résumé and business card with you! Visit ThisWayToCPA.com/ContactSociety to get in touch with your state's CPA society.

Underneath that cloak of mystery, CPAs are still pretty magical.

CPA MYTH VS. REALITY

CPAs take their jobs seriously, but that doesn't mean you have to play calculator BINGO every Saturday night.

Myth #1: You have to be a wallflower to be a CPA.

The reality: Contrary to what most people believe, many CPAs are outgoing, social, work well with others and make great leaders. In fact, several celebrities studied accounting before becoming famous—rocker Mick Jagger, author John

Grisham and even pro wrestler D'Lo Brown.

Myth #2: Accountants work in boring offices.

The reality: Accountants can be found anywhere. Why? Because EVERY organization needs them. You can get into forensic accounting or information technology or you can be a tax accountant or even a CPA for your favorite band. Do your research now to figure out what industry will be the best fit for you later. Chart your potential career path at **ThisWayToCPA.com/MyFit.**

Myth #3: All accountants are CPAs.

The reality: While all CPAs are accountants, not all accountants are CPAs. The CPA certification opens doors many accountants without the designation can't access. The respect, competitive compensation (a.k.a. more money) and geographic mobility that come with being a CPA is well worth the time invested.

The secrets of transferring are within you. Now go!

FINAL WORDS OF ADVICE

No two transfer students' paths will be alike. The transfer process is a pivotal point in any student's life and the CPA track isn't an easy one by any means, but it has certainly proven to be well worth it for many. Transferring to a four-year institution can go smoothly if you pay attention to key elements in the transfer process. Take advantage of the resources available to you, including your local and national CPA organizations. The AICPA (and your state society) can help you connect with remarkable CPAs who have a passion for helping students.

GOOD LUCK!

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All done?
Read it again for extra credit.

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