

STARS vs. Alabama Transfers for Students

More than a fresh coat of paint, the new Alabama Transfers system adds essential features and upgrades for students, advisors, counselors, AGSC members, and STARS staff.

Feature	STARS	Alabama Transfers	Details
Explore without commitment	×	✓	<p>Not all who wander are lost. Most students don't know exactly what they want to study, so we've designed the new site to meet them where they're at. Alabama Transfers encourages exploratory behaviors, enabling students to view and easily jump between multiple guides. By doing so, students will more thoroughly explore their options and make better, more informed decisions.</p> <p>This is in contrast to the old STARS site: even when submitting Unofficial Guides, students using STARS had to fill out a lengthy form with their personal information – and they had to redo this for each and every guide. Our surveys have shown that this hurdle discourages students from taking full advantage of our services. Who wants to fill out the same form a third, fourth, or fifth time on the mere chance of finding a more appealing major?</p>
Major guides	✓	✓	<p>In STARS, each transfer guide consisted of a single major, requiring students to sort through a list over 140 majors long. Alabama Transfers keeps this view, while adding some additional, helpful ways to browse.</p>
College-to-career pathways	×	✓	<p>While not a full-fledged career exploration tool – that will come later – Alabama Transfers takes several steps in that direction, enabling students to think not only in terms of majors, but in terms of college-to-career pathways. Our “pathway” guides cluster related majors together so that students can gradually hone in on their areas of interest, rather than shooting in the dark while selecting a major from a long list. These guides include helpful information such as sample careers and occupational outlook information so they can weigh their interests against practical realities.</p>

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Institution profiles	×	✓	<p>While we'd like to encourage students to think primarily about their interests and career opportunities, the reality is that there's more to the transfer decision. Each university comes with its own heritage, a unique culture and campus life, as well as a particular geography. We'd be selling students short if we didn't provide them with this information.</p> <p>Rather than linking students out to the universities' websites, as on the old STARS system, Alabama Transfers aggregates this information into institutional profiles. These profiles are connected to the majors and pathways, giving students another way to explore.</p>
University transfer requirements	×	✓	<p>Once they decide to take the next step toward transferring, students will need a place to view their chosen university's transfer requirements. Alabama Transfers maintains each institution's requirements in our main institutional database and gives students multiple ways to find and view this information.</p>
Course equivalency tables	×	✓	<p>Whereas STARS merely links to different universities' course equivalency tables, Alabama Transfers shows that information right alongside the pathway requirements. This saves students the round trip between different websites and enables us to keep the guides more up-to-date.</p>
Advanced Placement (AP) equivalencies	×	✓	<p>In addition to tracking course equivalency between two- and four-year institutions, Alabama Transfers also maintains a database of AP test equivalencies for each university.</p>

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Advanced search (majors, pathways & universities)	×	✓	With Alabama Transfers, students can find the needle without the haystack. If a student already has an idea of what they want to study but can't put it into words, they can find it via the Advanced Search functionality, rather than clicking through guide after guide.
Scholarship index	×	✓	Students' transfer decisions often depend upon the availability of scholarships. Alabama Transfers puts these opportunities at their fingertips, aggregating opportunities across all participating institutions.
College connection	×	✓	When students submit their transfer guides, they include some personal details including their current community college and major, as well as contact information. Alabama Transfers gives students the option to have these details forwarded to the universities of their choosing, so that the institutions can initiate contact and send additional recruiting information.
Guide versioning & redundancy	×	✓	When a student submits a guide, the new Alabama Transfers system will take a snapshot of the requirements. Each snapshot will then be accessible via a permanent link. That way, although universities' requirements will change over time, students can always refer back to the terms of their agreement at the time it was made. And all parties to the agreement – the student, the advisor, the institution, and the AGSC – will have a permanent record should any discrepancies arise.
Responsive web design	×	✓	The new Alabama Transfers site has been designed for use on all devices, from desktop PCs to laptops to tablets to smartphones.

STARS vs. Alabama Transfers for Advisors

Feature	STARS	Alabama Transfers	Details
College-to-career pathways	×	✓	In addition to helping students navigate transfer on their own, Alabama Transfers's college-to-career pathway guides serve as an invaluable framing device for advisors to initiate conversations with students about their futures. Armed with each pathway's selling points and occupational outlook information, in addition to its academic requirements, advisors can steer students down the pathway that's truly best for them.
Intuitive dashboard	×	✓	Unlike the old STARS system, which had a wealth of tools scattered throughout various site sections, the new Alabama Transfers site includes a landing page designed specifically for advisors, from which all the tools and information they need are a single click away.
Automated submission reporting	Manual, Quarterly	Real-time & Periodically	When a student submits a transfer guide, they may choose to have their information forwarded to one or more universities. With STARS, this process was manual and performed once every quarter. With Alabama Transfers, this process will be automated and done both in real-time (a notification per submission) and periodically (e.g. once per month). This way, the site will serve as a bridge between students, advisors, and institutions.
Offline access	×	✓	Because it's being developed as a progressive web app (PWA), Alabama Transfers gives advisors the ability to access the system even when they're offline.

STARS vs. Alabama Transfers for Administrators

Feature	STARS	Alabama Transfers	Details
Course & major template ratification	×	✓	With the old STARS site, the process to submit a new course or major was handled externally through email. Alabama Transfers closes this loop, enabling administrators to submit the forms to the same place where they retrieved them.
Real-time, granular usage reports	×	✓	On the old STARS site, usage reports are generated periodically and depict only certain data points. The usage reports generated by Alabama Transfers will be updated in real-time and will break down the data much more granularly, including new charts for the number of guides generated per student, the number of universities selected per official guide, and more.

STARS vs. Alabama Transfers for AGSC Members

Feature	STARS	Alabama Transfers	Details
Content editing	×	✓	On the old STARS site, all content changes must go through STARS staff. With the new Alabama Transfers system, we can create site accounts with scoped editing permissions, e.g. a secretary account with access only to meeting minutes, or a committee chair account with the ability to edit a specific equivalency table.
Meeting minutes	PDFs	Integrated	The integrated meeting minutes feature of the new Alabama Transfers system makes it easy to schedule future meetings, draft the agenda and send it out for comments, and record minutes and add attachments at the actual meeting.

STARS vs. Alabama Transfers for STARS Staff

Feature	STARS	Alabama Transfers	Details
Better content management	×	✓	On the old STARS site, information duplicated across multiple pages had to be updated multiple times, making it hard to keep all the content in sync. In the new Alabama Transfers system, nearly every piece of content on the website is editable through the content management system (CMS). Each content field can be reused on many pages.
Content delegation	×	✓	On the current STARS site, all content is maintained by STARS staff. With the new Alabama Transfers system, gone is the need for lengthy back-and-forths with stakeholders over email. While still retaining the ability to review and reject content before publication, the new Alabama Transfers system will be able to accept certain submissions directly from the relevant stakeholders. For example, advisors can submit scholarship listings; AGSC committee chairs can edit equivalency tables; meeting secretaries can edit minute meetings; and more.
Mailing lists & groups	×	✓	With the new system, we can manage newsletters, event RSVPs, surveys, etc. through the CMS.
Site analytics	×	✓	In addition to the transfer guide usage reports, the new Alabama Transfers site will keep detailed logs of web traffic, site search and navigation patterns, and more. This data will enable us to channel our efforts into the most used features. We may also use the information to facilitate improvements through A/B testing.
Test-driven development	×	✓	From security to accessibility, we ensure the new system exceeds the highest standards through test-driven development. This means that every feature and function will have a suite of automated tests that it must pass before it's deployed.
Backups & versioning	×	✓	The new system will be automatically backed up, and revisions will be stored in version control.

Project Timeline

