

SPECIAL REPORT

February 2008

The "Admissions" Side of BCCAT: An Update

Background

BCCAT has always had two roles reflected in its title, "admissions" and "transfer." However, over the years our emphasis has been on the transfer side of our mandate as we have worked with institutions to build a well-developed transfer system. In the latter half of 2003, recognizing that the ability of students to transfer credit in BC's Transfer System is integrally linked to opportunities to be admitted to and to move among post-secondary institutions, the Council also began focusing more on the admissions side of its mandate with the assistance of additional funding from the Ministry of Advanced Education (AVED).

The focus on admissions came at a time when the competition for available post-secondary spaces was high. As a result of greater demand for limited spaces, especially from secondary school students, the perception arose that there was no longer adequate space at universities for transfer students to continue their degrees. What was lacking, however, was reliable data that could be used to answer questions of capacity and demand and help institutions with enrolment planning.

The Admissions Committee

To spearhead Council's increased emphasis on admissions, BCCAT formed an Admissions Committee in Fall 2003. From the outset, the committee recognized the importance of institutional autonomy in determining admissions policies and processes at each institution, as reflected in its purpose statement: "Within the context of a decentralized system of autonomous institutions, the Admissions Committee will provide expert advice to BCCAT and will examine issues pertaining to capacity, demand, and student mobility and

recommend policies and practices that facilitate the admission process for direct entry and transfer students within the BC post-secondary system."

The Student Transitions Project (STP)

The Student Transitions Project (STP) began in Spring 2005 as a collaborative effort between the Ministries of Education (MEd) and Advanced Education and BC public post-secondary institutions to link data about students in the K-12 system and the province's public post-secondary system using the Personal Education Number (PEN). The data can then be used by both institutions and government to answer important questions on student transitions. The STP is managed by a steering committee with members from both Ministries and from post-secondary institutions.

As the STP project evolved, it became obvious that much of the existing and planned work of BCCAT's Admissions Committee on student mobility could best be accomplished under the STP because of (a) the formal agreement among all partners to share data for research purposes and (b) the work that had been done to deal with Freedom of Information considerations. Thus BCCAT has had a representative on the STP Steering Committee since September 2005, and that representative currently serves as its chair. Over the last few years, the projects in the Admissions Committee Work Plan with a focus on student mobility have become part of the STP Work Plan, carried out under the auspices of the STP Steering Committee working closely with BCCAT staff and using BCCAT funding. This melding of the work of the Admissions Committee and the STP has helped to advance significantly the student mobility research agenda that is part of BCCAT's admissions mandate.

Within the context of a decentralized system of autonomous institutions, the role of the Admissions Committee is to provide expert advice to BCCAT and examine issues pertaining to capacity, demand, and student mobility. It also recommends policies and practices that facilitate the admission process for direct entry and transfer students within the BC post-secondary system.

Progress Made on Admissions Agenda

Student Mobility Research

Most of the Council's efforts in admissions over the past four years has been directed toward examining capacity, demand, and mobility for both direct entry and transfer students. The Council has funded a number of research projects to attain the goal of collecting, analyzing, and reporting reliable, system-wide data on a systematic basis to assist institutions and government with planning. These projects are described briefly below, with reference to the role of the STP where appropriate. Full reports and highlights documents from these projects can be found at www.aved.gov.bc.ca/student_transitions.

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Mobility of Transfer Students

Universities have had access to reliable data for a number of years from the MEd to determine enrolment quotas and GPA cut-offs for Grade 12 students; however, they have not had adequate information about potential transfer student demand to assist with planning. BCCAT formed an Ad Hoc Committee and an Enrolment Planning Data Subcommittee in 2004 to explore ways of sharing information across sectors for enrolment planning purposes. The subcommittee conducted research using Fall 2004 and 2005 data on the number of "potential transfer students" in colleges, university colleges, and institutes and their subsequent enrolment in the following year in a university with transfer as the basis of admission.

The STP's Mobility of Transfer Students Subcommittee analyzes the movement of potential transfer students from one year into universities in the subsequent year.

The subcommittee was renamed the Mobility of Transfer Students Subcommittee and continued its work in 2006-07 under the auspices of the STP Steering Committee by analyzing the movement of Fall 2005 potential transfer students into universities in 2006. This represents the third year of such research, and thus it is possible to identify trends in transfer student enrolment.

Key findings:

- The number of students eligible to transfer to a university (n = 22,414) has gone down in each of the last three years with a 4.3% drop from Fall 2005 to Fall 2006.
- Transfers to universities in 2006 (n = 5,211) were down 4.1% from the previous year.
- Forty-eight percent of students eligible to transfer in 2006 remained at a college, university college, or institute.

These longitudinal data assist both universities and sending institutions to understand the evolving number of eligible transfer students and their mobility patterns. The report entitled *2006 Mobility of Transfer Students in BC* is found at www.bccat.ca/pubs/rr_july07.pdf.

Student Flows Among All Public Post-Secondary Institutions

The work described above examines the mobility among institutions of a subset of post-secondary students — those taking transferable courses. BCCAT funded a project in 2006/07 as part of the STP Work Plan to expand this mobility research by tracking the movement of entire Grade 12 graduation cohorts into and among post-secondary institutions in all directions over multiple years. This research builds on STP research that examines each year the movement of secondary school graduating cohorts into public post-secondary institutions, either directly or as delayed entrants after one or more years. The 2007 STP research found that 51% of 2001/02 graduates transitioned within 12 months of graduation, 62% did so after two years, 67% after three years, and 70% after four years.

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The purpose of the BCCAT project is to provide information about student mobility, such as which Grade 12 students during the four-year reporting period remained at the same BC post-secondary institution (retention); transitioned among post-secondary institutions; attended post-secondary institutions, left for a period, and then returned (stop outs); graduated with a post-secondary credential (graduates); and/or left the post-secondary institution and did not show up at another public post-secondary institution (leavers).

Key findings:

- There are wide regional variations in the qualifications of secondary school graduates and their rates of post-secondary participation.
- Students tend to follow regional patterns when moving among institutions.
- Secondary school graduates became less likely to enrol in college Arts and Science programs during the reporting period.
- Universities have the highest student retention while small colleges tend to keep their students for the shortest period with these students being least likely to subsequently enrol elsewhere in the system.

- Multiple enrolments at different institutions amount to less than 8 percent of all enrolments, and include students enrolled *sequentially* as well as *concurrently* at more than one institution.

Expanding Applicant Studies to More Post-Secondary Institutions

Studies have been conducted for several years on the flow of both direct entry and transfer applicants into universities and in 2004 into universities and university colleges through a BCCAT-funded study. For some time, BCCAT has supported the goal of expanding applicant studies to include a broader range of post-secondary institutions so that a more complete understanding could be gained of which institutions students apply to and where they eventually register. Being able to understand the behaviour of applicants across institutions at the program level could help provide information on whether the supply of available seats is meeting demand.

Considerable work has been done since 2004 exploring the feasibility of expanded applicant studies, first by BCCAT and then by Central Data Warehouse (CDW) institutions. The STP Steering Committee has formed an Applicant Research Subcommittee with representation from CDW institutions, universities, the Ministry, and BCCAT. The subcommittee is exploring the feasibility of conducting an expanded applicant study using Fall 2007 data.

BCCAT also funded a project in 2004 to determine the feasibility of having all post-secondary applicants assigned a Personal Education Number (PEN) by the MEd to make applicant research possible. Significant progress has been made by institutions in submitting applicant data to the MEd for PEN validation, with most institutions now submitting applicant data on a regular basis.

The STP Steering Committee has formed an Applicant Research Subcommittee which is exploring the feasibility of conducting an expanded applicant study using Fall 2007 data.

Other Admissions-Related Work

Although the bulk of BCCAT's admissions work has been in the area of student mobility, the Council has also made progress in the following areas related to the admissions side of its mandate.

Admissions Policies and Practices

Two projects have been undertaken in the area of admissions policies and practices. The first was an examination of potential issues arising from institutions having different dates for notifying students of acceptance to a program. A report concluded that moving to similar notification dates

would not solve any issues for direct entry or transfer students or for institutions because the key determinant of admissions decisions remains the timing of receiving final secondary school grades from the MEd.

The second project found that the admission GPAs computed by universities for transfer students differed based on the rules they used in their calculation, the number of college credits completed, and whether or not students had repeated or failed courses. The results suggested that students may have difficulty anticipating what their admission GPAs would be upon transfer. Based on this finding, the BC Registrars' Association (BCRA), with support from BCCAT, has formed a task group to examine actions that might help students understand how admission GPAs are calculated.

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Recognition of Degrees from Non-AUCC Institutions

During the past two years, BCCAT has endeavoured to address admissions issues pertaining to degree recognition. Of particular concern was the reluctance of some Ontario universities to consider applicants to graduate or professional programs if the applicants had obtained their undergraduate degrees from institutions that are not members of the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC). Details of BCCAT's concerns were outlined in a discussion paper published in June 2006 entitled *Recognition of Degrees from Non-AUCC Member Institutions: A Review of Issues*, available at www.bccat.ca/pubs/degreerecognition.pdf. BCCAT staff also participated in a national symposium that focused on a variety of issues pertaining to the degree recognition problem.

As a direct consequence of this symposium and in light of other discussions on this topic during the past few years, the Council of Ontario Universities (COU) developed and adopted a formal position intended to provide guidelines to Ontario universities that applicants should be considered for admission on an individual basis, based on their own merit. BCCAT is hopeful that the substance and spirit of the statement will be implemented and that baccalaureate graduates from BC institutions that are not AUCC members will be given fair consideration, based on their own merit, for admission to professional or graduate studies at Ontario universities.

Degree Partnership Models

Degree partnership is a term used to describe a variety of models that provide a guarantee of degree continuation at another institution to students who maintain adequate grades in a college program. BCCAT became interested in exploring the con-

cept of degree partnerships because the guarantee inherent in these partnerships provides more certainty to students enrolled in the first year or two of studies that a space will indeed be available for them at another institution to complete their degree. Hence, degree partnerships overcome the uncertainty that arises from fluctuating numbers of spaces and changing GPA cut-offs in receiving institutions from year to year. To promote discussion among BC post-secondary educators about degree partnerships, BCCAT published a Special Report in December 2006 entitled *Degree Partnerships in the BC Context* (available at www.bccat.bc.ca/pubs/sr_dec06.pdf). A symposium was also held on the topic in April 2007 as a follow-up to the report.

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Admissions Information for Students

Since 1990 BCCAT has managed the BC Transfer Guide (www.bctransferguide.ca), first in print and now online, as a trusted source of current information about transfer opportunities for BC students. In 2004, BCCAT began managing the Opening Doors website as a way of providing admissions information to students about programs in BC post-secondary institutions. The site was re-launched as Education Planner (www.educationplanner.ca) and significant enhancements have been made to improve its user friendliness and usefulness, following guidance from an Advisory Committee. The site provides free admissions information in one location on 1,700 post-secondary programs at institutions in the BC Transfer System, and the information is verified by those institutions.

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The number of Education Planner and BC Transfer Guide users has risen dramatically in the last year, indicating our success at providing valuable information to students, parents, and educators.

Conclusion

The past four years have seen significant development of BCCAT's admissions agenda under the auspices of its Admissions Committee and in partnership with the STP. We have made significant gains in providing systematic access to data about student enrolment and mobility; have engaged institutions in important policy discussions; and have provided students with current, reliable information on post-secondary programs. BCCAT plans to continue supporting research on student mobility and applicant flows. We hope this will assist institutions with enrolment planning, in periods of both increasing and declining student demand, as institutions become increasingly reliant on established enrolment planning practices to attract and retain students. The Council will also explore further work in the area of admissions apart from student mobility research.

Current Admissions Committee Membership

- **Jim Cooke** (Chair and Council member), Vice-President, Student & Instructional Support, Capilano College
- **Doug Francis**, Vice Principal, Sentinel Secondary School
- **Bob Harris** (Council member), Counsellor, College of New Caledonia
- **Paul G. Harrison** (Council member), Associate Dean of Science, University of British Columbia
- **Michael Lattimer** Counselling Department Head, Sir Winston Churchill Secondary School
- **Greg Lee**, President, Capilano College
- **Jan Lindsay**, Vice-President, Education, Douglas College
- **Mario Mazziotti**, Director, Institutional Research & Planning, BC Institute of Technology
- **Rick Monaghan**, Coordinator, Advising Centre, Malaspina University-College
- **Donna Moore**, Associate Director, Admissions, Simon Fraser University
- **Kate Ross**, Senior Director, Enrolment Services & Registrar, Simon Fraser University
- **Walter Sudmant**, Director, Planning and Institutional Research, University of British Columbia
- **Lynda Wallace-Hulecki**, Registrar & Executive Director, Student Enrolment, University of Victoria