

Transfer of Courses

One of the keys to a successful degree partnership is the ability to award credit at one institution for courses taken at another so that the courses can be applied to a particular credential. Therefore, in the American models the development and recording of transfer arrangements that guarantee equivalency of courses taught at different institutions is considered a must.

Fortunately, BC has a well-developed Transfer System and a very extensive set of transferable courses that are listed in the BC Transfer Guide maintained by BCCAT at www.bctransferguide.ca. Institutions exploring degree partnerships can use the BC Transfer Guide to make certain that transferability of first and second year courses has already been arranged by faculty at those institutions and to identify and address any gaps. Additional arrangements, such as block transfer and upper-level course articulation, may be required to supplement course-to-course transfers.

Electronic Data Interchange (EDI)

Regardless of the level of complexity of a degree partnership model, it is likely that student information will need to be exchanged quickly and frequently among institutions. In the US examples described in this paper, some form of EDI that can move data reliably and efficiently among institutions was cited as a must for successful partnerships, particularly given institutions' different student information systems.

One solution to the need for interoperability among different systems is called Web Services, which uses open standards to enable computer systems to communicate with each other on any platform. Web Services can be used to exchange data about students securely in real time across institutions. More information on Web Services can be found at www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Web_services. An example of a federated Web Services solution for inter-institutional electronic data exchange is the student information system (SIS) connectors being deployed by BCcampus. BCcampus has been supporting post-secondary institutions with the placement of servers at each institution to allow for the exchange of student data related to online learning in real time and in a secure environment. Such a system could also be used for the transmission of other data among institutions, such as the data required on shared students in degree partnerships (see "Innovations, Trends, and Creativity in Distance Learning" on www.bccampus.ca/AboutBCcampus/whitepapers.htm).

Student Financial Assistance

Another key consideration when planning a degree partnership is whether the model being used will conform to provincial and federal student financial assistance policies. In the US models described in this paper, students were able to achieve full-time status for financial aid purposes by combining credits from more than one institution.

Policies regarding financial aid in BC are described fully in the *British Columbia Student Assistance Program Policy and Procedure Manual* (www.aved.gov.bc.ca/student-services/school/06_07/policy_manual06.pdf). One relevant policy is in Chapter 1, Section 2 on Split Enrolment. The policy states that students that are enrolled in at least a 60 percent course load at two institutions are eligible for full-time student assistance if the course(s) are essential to the credential being sought from the "home" institution, which is the school that will eventually award the credential to the student. The second

institution must also be officially designated by the Student Services Branch (SSB) as being eligible for the BC Student Assistance Program (BCSAP). The SSB will communicate only with the home institution regarding the students in a split enrolment program.

A further relevant policy is found in Chapter 3, Section 2.6 on Partnerships/Joint Programs/Contracting. The policy states that such partnerships are eligible for BCSAP if both institutions are designated for BCSAP purposes and if students register, pay tuition and fees, and receive their credentials from the same designated institution. Institutions should review the Manual and contact the SSB in order to find out the full implications for student assistance, if any, of a degree partnership model.

Formalizing and Maintaining Relationships

OSU and Linn-Benton representatives noted the importance of developing explicit agreement at the outset on each institution's responsibilities in all aspects of the partnership and of maintaining regular communications among faculty and staff at both institutions. BC institutions considering a degree partnership model should agree formally at the beginning about what the partnership entails and about who will be responsible for what. Such an agreement should have the support of the highest levels in each institution. As the partnership evolves, ongoing communication should occur, in both formal and informal ways, among those responsible for various aspects of the partnership. The relationships built through such ongoing communication can help foster the spirit required to resolve issues and keep the partnership moving forward so that students are better served.

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Conclusion

We hope that the information presented in this paper will be of use to institutions contemplating or already working on some form of degree partnership model, regardless of its complexity, to provide guaranteed routes to degree completion for qualified students. As a follow up, BCCAT will be hosting a one-day symposium in Spring 2007 on degree partnership models in BC. The symposium will provide an opportunity for institutions to share experiences about both best practices and pitfalls in developing and implementing these models. More information on the symposium will be provided by BCCAT in the near future.

If you have any questions or comments, please contact Devron Gaber, BCCAT Associate Director, at dgaber@bccat.bc.ca or (604) 412-7790.

References

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SPECIAL REPORT

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DEGREE PARTNERSHIPS IN THE BC CONTEXT:

A Special Report by Devron Gaber, Associate Director, BCCAT

Introduction

Degree partnership is a term used to describe a variety of models that provide a guarantee to students who maintain adequate grades in a college program of continuation of degree studies at another institution. This "guarantee" that space will be available for degree completion at another institution separates degree partnerships from other models of transfer between institutions. Degree partnership models vary considerably in terms of form and complexity, and could involve a simple guarantee from a university that qualified college students will be admitted into the university, joint admission with a single application, and/or concurrent enrolment. In BC, degree partnerships can be and are being developed among different kinds of degree-granting institutions, including colleges, university colleges, institutes, and universities.

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Degree partnerships are particularly germane to the context of BC post-secondary education because of the extensive transfer system in BC that allows students to begin a program of study at one institution and complete it at another. Degree partnerships are also relevant in terms of the high level of student mobility already occurring among BC public institutions, as indicated in recent student mobility research (see www.bccat.bc.ca/pubs/rr_may06.pdf). It is for these reasons that the BC Council on Admissions and Transfer (BCCAT), and more specifically its Admissions Committee, have taken an interest in the potential benefits of such partnerships.

Such benefits are listed below. Degree partnerships can:

- Help students by giving them more guaranteed and varied options for starting and completing a baccalaureate degree.
- Be used by colleges as a means of recruiting and serving students to begin their guaranteed degree path at a college, assuming that adequate marks are maintained.
- Address recent concerns held by many college officials that enrolment in their university transfer programs was being curtailed because of a perception among students of a lack of spaces at universities for degree completion.
- Be used by universities and university colleges to ensure a predictable supply of qualified transfer students.

- Be used by all institutions to help meet growth targets established through the recent expansion of post-secondary seats in the province.
- Take advantage of different institutions' areas of expertise in the development and delivery of degree programs.
- Make more effective use of resources, both in terms of reduced duplication of effort at institutions and of students getting full credit for previous learning.

The purpose of this paper is to raise the level of awareness and promote discussion among post-secondary educators about the degree partnership concept and its applicability and benefits in the BC context. The paper does not delve into other forms of collaborative arrangements, such as block transfer, laddered programs, shared facilities, and so on, many of which are already in place among BC institutions, nor does it deal with partnerships between public and private institutions.

Degree Partnership/Guaranteed Admission Models in the United States

The development of degree partnerships has been undertaken by various institutions in the US over the last several years. Although there are some differences between the US and BC contexts, there are also many similarities which make the US experience instructive for BC post-secondary institutions. The following section provides a brief overview of three models being employed in two different states.

Oregon State University's Degree Partnership Program

Oregon State University (OSU), a leader in this arena, began developing degree partnerships with Linn-Benton Community College in 1998, with both institutions located in and around Corvallis, Oregon. OSU now has bilateral degree partnership agreements with 12 other community colleges in Oregon and will soon sign 2 agreements with community colleges in Hawaii. The OSU/Linn-Benton Degree Partnership Program (DPP) is a good example of a high degree of collaboration between two institutions in the provision of both courses and student services and is thus much more complex to administer than simpler models. Because the two institutions are geographically close, 85% of Linn-Benton transfer students were already transferring to OSU and many students were "swirling," that is taking courses from both institutions simultaneously or moving back and forth between institutions. The DPP model was designed to remove inter-institutional barriers and to facilitate the

dual enrolment that was already occurring. Indeed, the first three majors developed within the partnership were in disciplines which already had significant levels of dual enrolment. Essentially, the DPP puts students in control of creating an education program that works for them while meeting the stated goal of the DPP to “promote college persistence and the completion of baccalaureate degrees” (Bontrager, Clemetsen, and Watts, 2005, p. 3).

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In the OSU/Linn-Benton partnership, students who meet OSU’s admission criteria are admitted through a joint, online process, and only one application fee is paid by the student. They then register at each institution following each institution’s registration process and pay tuition and fees based on courses taken at either institution. Students may enrol concurrently at both institutions, and student records are kept at each institution and shared electronically, including financial aid records. Students are eligible for financial aid based on combined credits in both institutions through the DPP. Academic advising is a joint responsibility of both institutions, and DPP students at Linn-Benton can gain access to a full suite of OSU services for a fee. The DPP model involves significant ongoing interaction among administrative staff at both institutions as well as ongoing communication among faculty regarding course delivery and credit transfer.

OSU and Linn-Benton representatives have given the following advice as to the requirements for a successful degree partnership model:

- Establish at the outset a Memorandum of Understanding that is explicit about all aspects of the partnership.
- Begin with a manageable pilot project, preferably in a “high-swirl” program area.
- Use only a single application process that is web-based.
- Make use of electronic data interchange (EDI) technology to share student transcripts, records, and financial aid information quickly and efficiently.
- Do not create add-on processes for a partnership program but integrate into current systems whenever possible.
- Develop and record transfer and articulation arrangements.
- Maintain regular communications among staff and faculty at both institutions.

Further information on the OSU degree partnership model can be found at www.oregonstate.edu/partnerships.

Portland Area Higher Education Consortium Co-Admission Model

The Portland Area Higher Education Consortium was formed in spring 2006 and involves Portland State University (PSU) and four community colleges in the Portland, Oregon area. The Consortium was formed based on the strength of existing bilateral dual enrolment and co-admission agreements between PSU and the four colleges, which had been signed between 1997 and 2003. About 60 percent of PSU’s new students transfer with 30 or more credit hours, and 89% of transfer students come from the four community colleges in the Consortium. Like the OSU DPP model, a key impetus behind the co-admission model and the more recent Consortium was that considerable student swirling was already occurring among Portland

area institutions. Co-admission agreements were originally developed to support what students were already doing. The Consortium was formed in part because limited public funds made it difficult for post-secondary institutions in close proximity to deliver a complete array of programs and compete with each other for students.

Within the five-institution Consortium, students who meet PSU admission criteria gain full admission to all five institutions. These students also have access to PSU services while at one of the community colleges and can count credit from more than one institution for financial aid purposes. The Consortium is governed by a Coordinating Council made up of the presidents of the five institutions. Staff of the Consortium conduct ongoing policy analyses to determine how different institutional policies impact student mobility across institutions. Efforts are also being made to build a crosswalk for course equivalency across institutions (similar to the BC Transfer Guide). The long-term goal of the Consortium is to make the experience of taking courses from Consortium institutions as seamless as possible for students, as illustrated by the motto “a student at one is a student at all.” An important part of the Consortium’s early work has been the development of mechanisms by which institutions can exchange student data electronically in real time among the different student information systems.

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University of Virginia Guarantee of Admission

The University of Virginia announced in April 2006 a new policy that would provide guaranteed admission to its College of Arts and Sciences for qualified students from the 23 community colleges in the Virginia Community College System (VCCS). The policy was developed in an effort to make the university, a highly ranked public institution in the US, more accessible to students who may have previously felt that they were unqualified for admission because of high admission requirements. The Guaranteed Admission Agreement can be viewed at www.virginia.edu/undergradadmission/docs/agreement.doc.

The University of Virginia guarantee of admission differs from the degree partnership models discussed earlier in that it does not involve dual enrolment. Instead, students must first meet a number of requirements in the college system in order to be granted admission subsequently to the university. These requirements include:

- An Associate Degree, completed in the VCCS within the two-year period prior to applying to the university.
- At least 54 transferable credit hours with at least 45 of them from the VCCS.
- A minimum Grade Point Average (GPA) of 3.4 on a 4.0 scale in VCCS coursework.
- At least a B grade in VCCS English courses and at least a C in all other VCCS courses.
- Specific course requirements for admission to the College of Arts and Science.

Students who meet all of the requirements are guaranteed admission as a third-year student in a baccalaureate degree program. The degree requires a total of 120 credits to complete, and a minimum of 60 of those must be taken at the university.

Degree Partnerships and Guaranteed Admission Models in BC

This section provides a brief description of efforts being made in BC among post-secondary institutions to develop degree partnerships and/or to provide guaranteed admission for college students to degree completion opportunities. The list of such partnerships in BC is not meant to be exhaustive but rather illustrative of the important work currently occurring in BC.

Thompson Rivers University/College of New Caledonia Dual Admission Process

In May 2006, Thompson Rivers University (TRU) and the College of New Caledonia (CNC) signed a Memorandum of Agreement in which both institutions agreed to undertake a number of measures to expand degree completion opportunities for CNC students. These measures include the development of laddering agreements for graduates of CNC certificate and diploma programs, distance education delivery of TRU degrees, and a Dual Admission process. The latter form of partnership is most relevant to this paper and is described below.

The list of such (degree) partnerships in BC is not meant to be exhaustive but rather illustrative of the important work currently occurring in BC.

The process being developed by TRU and CNC for Dual Admission provides a guarantee to CNC students who meet established requirements that they will have access to degree completion in TRU Bachelor of Arts, Science, or Business Administration degrees, which have been chosen because of the strength of the articulation agreements already in place. The two institutions intend to expand the scope of Dual Admission programs in the future. New or existing CNC students will complete a Dual Admission application form. They must ensure that their CNC courses are transferable to TRU and applicable to their chosen program. These students will then be identified by TRU as TRU/CNC Dual Admission students and will be given a TRU ID number. Once Dual Admission students complete at least 30 transferable credits at CNC with a minimum 2.0 GPA, they will then receive registration priority at TRU based on credits completed. They will be treated during the registration process in the same way as current TRU students and not classified as transfer students. While Dual Admission students are studying at CNC, TRU and CNC will cooperate in advising students about degree requirements.

University College of the Fraser Valley/ Douglas College Partnership Degrees

Douglas College and the University College of the Fraser Valley (UCFV) have developed a partnership model for joint delivery of degrees in Psychology and Criminal Justice. The main purpose of the partnership is to provide students in the Douglas College region access to degree completion opportunities at UCFV without having to attend many or, in the case of Psychology, any classes at the UCFV campus. Admission to both partnership degrees is competitive based on GPA; however, once students are admitted, they are guaranteed access to the courses they need for degree completion, either through priority registration in Year 3 or by reserved seats in Year 4. All degree requirements taken at Douglas are accepted for transfer at UCFV.

In the Psychology degree, students may apply for admission to the partnership degree after they have completed 45 credits of university transfer courses toward an Associate of Arts degree. Once admitted to the program, students complete their Associate of Arts degree and an additional 30 credits of Douglas College courses, including at least five courses that transfer to UCFV at the 3rd or 4th year level. Students

then take Year 4 UCFV courses as a cohort at Douglas from Douglas faculty. The Criminal Justice degree is similar except that students must complete 60 specified, transferable credits at Douglas and/or another institution in first and second year courses, which often lead to a Criminology diploma, and meet a minimum GPA requirement. Entry to the partnership degree takes place at the beginning of Year 3 in which students take 30 credits of Douglas College courses taught by Douglas faculty. Year 4 students then take UCFV courses taught by UCFV faculty at UCFV.

University of Victoria/Camosun College Nursing Degree

The University of Victoria (UVic) and Camosun College cooperate in delivering the Baccalaureate Degree in Nursing (BSN), which is part of a larger partnership known as the Collaboration for Academic Education in Nursing (CAEN) program involving eight BC institutions and one from the Northwest Territories (www.camosun.bc.ca/learn/programs/nurse.html). Students take the first two and a half years of the degree at Camosun and then complete the remaining one and a half years at UVic, which does not offer the earlier years of the degree. Students do not receive a credential upon exiting Camosun but rather continue at UVic for degree completion. Camosun students are guaranteed a space at UVic as long as they maintain adequate grades at Camosun.

Camosun College Engineering Bridge Program

Camosun College offers an Engineering Bridge program to students wanting to continue with a Bachelor of Engineering or Bachelor of Software Engineering at UVic or a Bachelor of Applied Science in Engineering at the University of British Columbia (UBC) (www.uvicbridge.camosun.bc.ca/InformationBooklet2006.pdf). Camosun offers this six-month Bridge program to its own Technology diploma graduates or to graduates from similar programs in other colleges and technical institutes. Admission to the Bridge program is competitive based on GPA in the diploma program, and students who maintain adequate grades have guaranteed entry directly into third year of the UVic and UBC degrees. Successful students leave Camosun with an Advanced Diploma. Bridge programs are offered by Camosun for entry to UVic in Mechanical, Electrical, Computer, or Software Engineering and for entry to UBC in Civil or Mining Engineering.

Malaspina University-College/North Island College Priority Registration Agreement

Malaspina University-College and North Island College (NIC) finalized in late 2005 a Priority Registration Agreement which, although not a full degree partnership model, does provide a form of guarantee for students. Malaspina offers priority registration to NIC students if they transfer directly to second or third year at Malaspina in University Arts and Science or Business Administration. NIC students must successfully complete at least 15 credits of transferable coursework at NIC by January 1 if they want to transfer to Malaspina in that year. If NIC students meet these requirements, they are considered continuing students at Malaspina rather than transfer students and are given priority registration along with Malaspina students, thus greatly increasing their chances of successfully enrolling at the university college (nic.bc.ca/programs/agreements.htm).

Important Considerations for Degree Partnerships in the BC Context

Based on both the US and BC partnerships described in this paper, a list of considerations has been provided below that may be relevant for BC institutions contemplating the development of a degree partnership model. If institutions take these considerations into account in the formative stages of a partnership, such partnerships will hopefully operate more smoothly from the outset. Institutions may also engage in less complex partnership models, providing some form of guaranteed access to degree completion, without the necessity of addressing all of these considerations.