

# Special Report

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## Flexible Pre-Majors: Improving the BC Transfer System for Students & Institutions

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### What's the Problem?

*Tom is planning to complete two years of a University Transfer program at his hometown college to save money living with his parents. He wants to major in psychology, but is having difficulty figuring out what he'll do when he finishes at the college and transfers to a degree program at another institution. When he's looked into the first and second year courses for psychology majors at various universities, there seems to be a dizzying array of requirements. He's not sure what to take at the college to keep his options open.*

*Susan is finishing her second year at university, having been careful to complete all the courses needed to enter the third year of an English major. She now has to move to another city with her family and the university there has different English major requirements. She's worried she won't be able to enter the major, or she'll be required to take summer school courses and/or complete extra courses in her third and fourth years. None of these options seem fair to her, since she's been so careful to plan her university program.*

Even when comprehensive course-to-course articulations are published in the BC Transfer Guide, students may find it difficult to transfer at the third year level to start their chosen major because they are missing key lower level requirements. Students who've planned their first and second year courses to meet the requirements to enter, or continue in, a major at a particular post-secondary institution may run into difficulties if they end up attending a different institution. According to post-secondary advisors, fulfilling the requirements for entry into majors at the third year level can be a problematic area of transfer for academic students.

### The Role of Post-Secondary Institutions

All institutions review and update their programs over time, offering specializations based on departmental philosophy and expertise. With the increased number of degree-granting post-secondary institutions in BC, universities and colleges are under pressure to devise unique approaches to majors. This can mean that pre-major requirements can vary from one institution to another. Sending institutions face a more complex task since they must try to align their curriculum with that of several receiving institutions, or risk disadvantaging their students.

### Options for Solving the Problem

Historically in BC the emphasis has been on facilitating solutions that recognize the importance of diversity and institutional autonomy in the post-secondary system rather than on standardization. One possible approach to solving this problem for students and institutions is the development of flexible pre-majors.

## What is a Flexible Pre-Major?

'Pre-Major' refers to first and second year courses that students are required to complete in order to be admitted to a major at the third year level.

A Flexible Pre-Major (FPM) is a set of **flexible** requirements:

- deliverable by sending institutions & acceptable to receiving institutions, and
- deemed to fulfill the lower level requirements for the major.

## What are the Benefits of Flexible Pre-Majors for Students?

With FPM agreements in place across many sending and receiving institutions, students can plan their first and second year courses to leave open multiple options for transferring into various BC institutions and for entering the major at the third year level. If students have planned to attend a particular university and end up not doing so, completion of the FPM requirements for their chosen major will provide them other possibilities. Completion of FPM requirements will also mean students should not be required to pick up 'missing' courses for their major in their third and fourth years, or repeat content they have already covered. Tom, Susan and others in similar positions would be much better served by the BC Transfer System if a Flexible Pre-Major was in place in their intended majors.

## What are the Benefits of Flexible Pre-Majors for Post-Secondary Institutions?

**Sending institutions** can continue to offer first and second year courses that are distinctive, reflecting unique approaches to academic disciplines in both curriculum and delivery. At the same time being part of an FPM will assure them that their students will have many paths open to them when transferring at the third year level. The Flexible Pre-Major will be particularly advantageous for smaller institutions that do not have the range of courses necessary to prepare students for a variety of majors in third and fourth years, since students who complete the first two years there will retain many options for their final two years. In some cases smaller institutions that do not offer

all the first and second year requirements for an FPM can still take part by identifying ways for their students to take transferable courses via distance delivery through other institutions.

**Receiving institutions** participating in a Flexible Pre-Major will be seen as a destination by students from all sending institutions participating in the FPM, not just those from institutions that offer identical or very similar first and second year courses. Flexible Pre-Majors can thus provide recruitment advantages for both sending and receiving institutions.

## What Flexible Pre-Majors are Not

Flexible Pre-Majors are *not* replacements for other important tools that assist transfer, such as Course-to-Course articulation, the Block Transfer Guide or the Associate Degree.

Course-to-Course articulation will continue to be the foundation for transfer in BC. New models of transfer like FPMs will be value-added, addressing problems that can't be solved by course-to-course articulation or other transfer tools.

Flexible Pre-Majors do *not* mean that post-secondary institutions must offer identical courses or courses that have exactly the same curriculum, delivered in the same manner.

The nucleus of the FPM is an agreement on a set of courses that all receiving institutions will accept *in lieu* of their own specific course requirements. Use of the term 'in lieu' is important, rather than the term 'identical': what is important is to assess whether the student who has completed a particular group of courses in first and second year is sufficiently prepared to enter a major program at the third year level with reasonable prospects of academic success.

## What Disciplines Have or Will Have Flexible Pre-Majors?

A Flexible Pre-Major is now in place for Music. (See [bctransfer-guide.ca/program/music](http://bctransfer-guide.ca/program/music).) FPMs currently in development: Anthropology; Computer Education; Economics; English; Psychology; and Sociology.

## Need further information on Flexible Pre-Majors?

Contact **Jennifer Orum, Special Projects Coordinator** at the BC Council on Admissions and Transfer. [tel. (604) 412 7679 or email [jorum@bccat.ca](mailto:jorum@bccat.ca)]



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Your guide through  
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