BCCAT BRITISH COLUMBIA COUNCIL ON ADMISSIONS & TRANSFER

Enabling the BC Transfer System: A Discussion Paper

Purpose

This discussion paper outlines processes, as well as opportunities and constraints, for "enabling" BC Transfer System institutions to enhance transfer credit information in the BC Transfer Guide, making it more reflective of institutional practices and student mobility.   BCCAT's focus is increasing the availability of transfer credit information for students so they may better plan their pathways across institutions, where appropriate to their educational needs and goals.

Background and Context

In 1989, BCCAT was established as a advisory council to the Minister responsible for Advanced Education with a mandate to oversee the BC Transfer System - a network of autonomous public and private institutions offering university transferrable courses that are articulated with one another. In accordance with BCCAT's *Principles and Guidelines for Transfer* and *New Members Policy,* BC Transfer System member institutions adhere to principles of mutual respect, accountability, transparency, consistency, and quality assurance with regard to the application of transfer credit. The universality of articulation is one of the core strengths of the BC Transfer System. Member institutions review articulation requests with a commitment to facilitating appropriate credit transfer and student mobility through transparent processes and publicly listed articulation agreements.

The first edition of the BC Transfer Guide was published in 1990 and is now updated daily at bctransferguide.ca. In relation to historic roles and assumptions concerning credit transfer and student mobility, institutions have listed formal articulation agreements in differing capacities: as sending, receiving, or both. However, significant shifts in institutional mandates and system complexity have occurred since the inception of the BC Transfer Guide over 20 years ago. There are now 11 public and four private university members of the BC Transfer System, and the majority of institutions are offering one or more degree programs. Further, student mobility data indicate students are moving across sectors and between institutions within sectors, regardless of whether an institution performs sending or receiving functions.

New Look at Student Mobility in the BC Public Post-Secondary Education System

- 22,500 active credit course registrants moved between BC public post-secondary institutions, from 2007/08 to 2008/09.
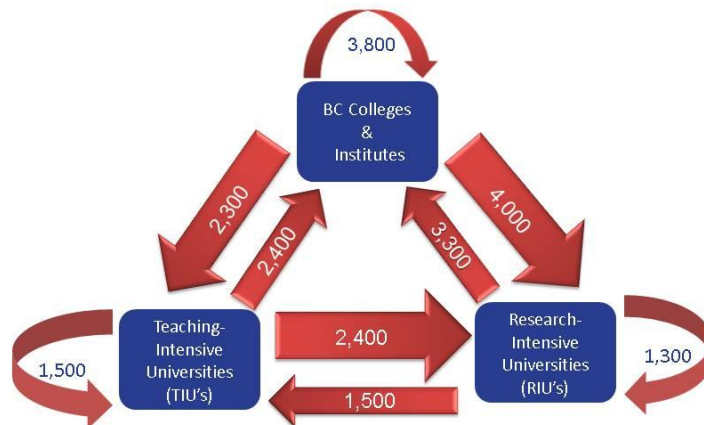
Source: Student Transitions Project

In keeping with these shifts, several institutions have expressed interest in expanding the scope of their listings in the BC Transfer Guide beyond their current roles.

Current Situation

Currently 40 institutions comprise the BC Transfer System. Seven perform receiving functions only, 18 perform sending functions only, and 13 perform both sending and receiving functions. Two institutions with distinctive curriculum and program design do not articulate on a course-by-course basis.

There are two ways that articulations can be established in the BC Transfer Guide: a formal sending request by an institution through BCCAT's Transfer Credit Evaluation System (TCES) or a receiver initiated evaluation submitted through the TCES. Each institution has a TCES account that permits sending and/or receiving functions. The BC Transfer Guide contains over 74,000 active articulation arrangements. On average, 5,000 new agreements are created each year. However, course credit equivalencies that exist outside the TCES are not listed. Specifically, the BC Transfer Guide does not list:

- Equivalencies between institutions that perform receiving functions only
- Equivalencies between institutions that perform sending functions only
- Equivalencies between institutions that perform receiving functions only and those that perform sending functions only

BCCAT has already enabled technologies to allow for all institutions to send or receive articulation requests, so no technological constraints would prevent expansion of the BC Transfer Guide. BCCAT's *New Members Policy* acknowledges that institutions which currently send requests only or receive requests only can apply to BCCAT to add the sending function or receiving function. Recently, BC's four public research universities, which have traditionally performed receiving functions only, have implemented a pilot to list equivalencies amongst each other and to articulate credit transfer agreements within the TCES. One college has also recently taken on receiving functions, and several more are exploring similar roles.

Such changes in articulation activity are contingent upon an institution being deemed by the Council to be "articulating successfully, as appropriate to its programs and its status as a sending or receiving institution, when its faculty are participating in articulation committee meetings, when it is communicating as necessary with BCCAT through the Institutional Contact Person (ICP) and others, when students have started to transfer successfully, and when no significant concerns have been raised about its membership in the system." However, at this point, BCCAT has a policy and process by which sending only institutions may take on receiving functions after a self-study and application (*Designation as a Receiving Institution in the BC Transfer Guide: Policy and Process*), but does not have a specific policy and process to guide current receiving only institutions in taking on sender functions.

Proposal

BCCAT is proposing that all institutions be enabled to enhance the scope of their role in the BC Transfer Guide by lifting the sending/receiving restrictions and revising the language of the bctransferguide.ca site and appropriate BCCAT documents in a manner commensurate with these changes.

Specific implications of this proposal would include the following:

- **All institutional TCES accounts would be enabled to perform sending/receiving functions.**

- o **Example:** Currently, institutions are limited to performing sending or receiving functions through the TCES. Under this proposal, all institutional TCES accounts would be enabled to perform both sending and receiving functions.

- **All institutions would be given flexibility to pursue expansion of their current listings in the manner most appropriate to their institution and students.**
    - o **Example 1:** An institution that currently performs sending functions only would have the option of responding or not to new requests to receive credits from other institutions. It would not be obligated to establish new articulation agreements with institutions for which there is no valid business case[1] for doing so.
    - o **Example 2:** An institution that currently performs receiving functions only would have the option to send requests to other institutions as appropriate in keeping with established or anticipated transfer credit pathways. If an institution does not wish to send any formal articulation requests, it would not be obligated to establish new articulation agreements with institutions for which there is no valid business case for doing so.

- **All institutions would be able to declare credit for any member institution courses they evaluate independent of the TCES and to have this information published within the BC Transfer Guide.**
    - o **Example 1:** This practice is already common for institutions performing receiving functions. Current sending only institutions that take on receiving functions would be given this same opportunity. In keeping with normative expectations for all transfer system institutions, any published transfer credit equivalencies must be guaranteed by the institution awarding credit, requiring that it reviews and maintains the currency of the articulation agreement over time.
    - o **Example 2:** If an institution currently maintains a supplementary internal database of guaranteed course credit equivalencies it grants, these equivalencies could be provided to BCCAT in an electronic format for import into the BC Transfer Guide. This would allow institutions to publish additional transfer information that they maintain, but is not publicly accessible at present.

Assumptions

BCCAT is aware that any expansion of transfer credit information within the BC Transfer Guide should proceed cautiously with due consideration of the implications to the system as a whole. Therefore, BCCAT is operating under two assumptions in making this proposal:

1. **Institutions want articulation agreements to reflect credit transfer and student mobility patterns.**

Regardless of whether an institution functions as a sender, receiver, or both within the BC Transfer Guide, in practice, to some extent all institutions send and receive students as part of admission and registration cycles.   Most institutions evaluate and award some transfer credit outside of the formal articulation processes supported by BCCAT, yet many of these transfer credit decisions remain unpublished and inaccessible to students.   This proposal seeks to help address this gap by removing barriers that prevent institutions from expanding their credit transfer listings in the BC Transfer Guide.

2. **Institutions do not want a significant increase in articulation work.**

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[1] A business case is defined as the necessary minimum amount of student mobility to justify formal articulation.

Careful consideration of where resources should be expended is crucial to an efficient and effective transfer system. BCCAT recognizes that while honouring their commitments to the system, institutions should have the capacity to determine their roles within the BC Transfer Guide in keeping with their credit transfer activity. The outcomes of this proposal would be dependent upon each institution's willingness to enhance the availability of its credit transfer information and / or the scope of its articulation.

Opportunities

This proposal provides several potential opportunities for students and institutions alike. The key benefit would be an increase in the available transfer information at the BC Transfer Guide website. This would assist students in making more informed choices about their transfer pathways. A further outcome would be increased transparency and accountability of transfer arrangements among participating institutions.

Constraints

Implications arise for all institutions when one expands the scope of its articulation activity. An issue that would require consideration in moving forward under the proposed scenario is the maintenance of articulation agreements, which is a shared responsibility between institutions. The proposed enabling of sending and receiving functions for all institutions could lead to the proliferation of receiver initiated evaluations that could place demands on the *de facto* sending institution. It could also lead to the proliferation of sending requests from institutions new to this articulation practice. Therefore, in considering this proposal, collectively we must also consider implications for the system as a whole within a fully enabled environment:

- When an institution unilaterally declares credit for another institution's course, what is the obligation of both parties to maintain that agreement?
- Since institutions already routinely declare credit for another institution's courses, how do current institutions deal with the imposed maintenance implications?
- Is there a greater role for articulation committees or BCCAT with regard to notifications of course changes?
- What reasonable evidence of likely or actual student mobility should inform an articulation request?

BCCAT believes this proposal presents an opportunity to review articulation responsibilities, and will consult with the system to seek common understanding and agreement before undertaking any system level changes. To that end, a detailed survey that expands on the illustrative questions identified above has been developed to accompany this proposal.

Consultation Process

In order to consider this proposal and inform development of a possible implementation strategy, BCCAT is seeking feedback from transfer system member institutions: students, faculty, and staff. BCCAT would appreciate your circulating this document to relevant personnel and groups within your institution or organization. BCCAT also requests that individuals and/or groups participate in an online survey focussed on specific process and practice implications. The survey is available at http://app.fluidsurveys.com/s/enabling/. Staff, relevant committees, and Council will review feedback from the survey and consultation sessions with system groups to inform recommendations in a subsequent report.

Please direct any questions to consultation@bccat.ca

Activities and Timeline

Activity	Timeline
Post *Enabling the BC Transfer System: A Discussion Paper* and accompanying survey on the BCCAT website for discussion and feedback.	July-Sept., 2011
Conduct consultations with system groups (e.g., BCRA, BCCARMA, CSSAL, Deans, SAAF, VPAC), and institutions (if requested) during their fall meetings.	Sept.-Nov., 2011
Host workshop on provisional findings and possible implementation recommendations at BCCAT's Joint Annual Meeting.	Nov. 4, 2011
Prepare report and recommendations for the BCCAT Transfer and Articulation Committee and Council review.	Fall / Winter 2011-12
Revise existing BCCAT documents, guides and policies as necessary to reflect approved policy changes.	Winter / Spring 2012
Begin implementation of any approved changes to the Transfer Credit Evaluation System and BC Transfer Guide.	Winter / Spring 2012

Last Updated: July, 2011