

Transfer Credit Assessment:

A Survey of Institutional Practices

Prepared for BCCAT by I. S. Educational Consulting Inc.

January 2015



Research by

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Executive Summary

Assessing credits that transfer students bring to an institution may require a significant amount of institutional resources. The increased mobility of students among post-secondary institutions in BC, and the need to ensure efficient admission processes for both the student and the institution, makes transfer credit assessment an important subject for the province's post-secondary system.

The purpose of this project is to review institutional policies and practices of transfer credit assessment, and to identify issues and effectiveness of the assessment process. This study investigates policies and practices of transfer credit assessment at post-secondary institutions (PSI's) in BC and at key institutions across the country, specifically focusing on any issues and the timing of transfer credit assessment.

Overall, BC colleges show a tendency to do the assessment once an applicant commits to the institution, and larger BC institutions tend to assess transfer credit during admissions, before an applicant becomes a registrant. Opinions expressed by BC admissions and registrarial professionals suggest that early transfer credit assessment is positively linked with applicant conversion, providing value to both the institution and the applicant.



The purpose of this project is to review institutional policies and practices of transfer credit assessment, and to identify issues and effectiveness of the assessment process.

The high volume of assessment requests during certain periods (e.g. summer) and low availability of faculty and staff during the same time were regarded as issues at some institutions. Maintaining and publishing a database of assessed non-BC courses would help applicants in their decisions as well as lessening the pressure on institutional resources. The assessment of international transfer courses could serve as a focus for future research.

Introduction

Assessing credits that transfer students bring to an institution may require a significant amount of institutional resources (Tobolowsky & Cox, 2012). One factor in a transfer student's decision to accept an offer of admission is an institution's assessment of transfer credit and its application to the student's new program. While this provides an incentive to institutions to perform transfer credit assessment as a part of the application review, especially in highly competitive recruitment environments, the process can result in delayed offers of admission, and can consume institutional resources without any guarantee that these offers will be accepted.

The BC Transfer System streamlines the transfer process for students who move from one post-secondary institution to another through block-transfer and course-to-course articulation agreements. The increased mobility of students among post-secondary institutions in BC, and the need to ensure efficient admission processes for both the student and the institution, makes transfer credit assessment an important subject for the province's post-secondary system.

Transfer credit assessment can serve two purposes. Although both are relevant in most cases, the prevalence of each purpose can be decisive in the timing of transfer credit evaluation:

The increased mobility of students among post-secondary institutions in BC, and the need to ensure efficient admission processes for both the student and the institution, makes transfer credit assessment an important subject for the province's post-secondary system.

1. Assessment of transfer credit as a basis of admission. This assessment is typically done at institutions with a minimum acceptable grade requirement, and especially at PSI's with competitive admissions.
2. Evaluation of transfer credit as a substitute for courses at the receiving institution. Institutions typically emphasize their goal to accept as much transferred credit as possible; however, not all credit is accepted. An institution offering more credits can appeal to applicants when they are applying to more than one PSI.

While institutions typically recognize the benefit of early credit assessment (i.e., assessment prior to a letter of offer), some find that it can be inefficient if there is a lower rate of conversion for transfer students who receive an offer. Research indicates that the institutions that assess transfer credits early are viewed more positively by peer-institutions and students (Camman, Hamade, & Zhou, 2014; Ott, 2012; Ott & Cooper, 2014; Tobolowsky & Cox, 2012). Some U.S. institutions have policies that limit transfer credit assessment to students who have committed to the institution by submitting a tuition deposit (Ott, 2012). Others will only assess credit for enrolled students after classes begin (U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO), 2005). These "late" policies create inequities by "asking a [transfer] student to purchase a product without knowing its full price" (Ott, 2012, p. 143). AACRAO (2001) recommends that institutions provide clear information on what types of credits can and cannot be transferred before students enroll. This standard is based on the belief that timely, fair, and clearly communicated assessment of transfer credit improves the likelihood of transfer students' success at the receiving institution (Lane, 2012; Mullin, 2012; Tobolowsky & Cox, 2012).

Some institutions are relatively new to their receiving role, and may not have established practice around the timing of transfer credit assessment. Insufficient resources to assess transfer credit, especially in smaller institutions that have not traditionally relied on transfer (Ott, 2012), may result in a backlog in transfer credit assessment up to one year from a transfer student's matriculation (U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO), 2005).

In addition to students transferring within established transfer systems¹, many institutions admit transfer students from other jurisdictions and out-of-country, who are also impacted by the timing of transfer credit assessment. In these cases, including institutions may resort to case-by-case review of each individual course, reliance on accreditation of sending institutions (U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO), 2005), or independent organizations that, for a fee, assess out-of-country credentials (e.g., International Credential Evaluation Service). Usually, out-of-country transfer assessment is less efficient than for those from established transfer systems and requires longer time and more resources.

Ott (2012) identifies several factors that increase efficiency of transfer credit evaluation:

1. Concentration of the assessment in a single department (such as Admissions) to minimize the need to coordinate between different parts of the institution;
2. Extended use of technology – document imaging, access to established transfer systems, and automation of the assessment; and
3. Adequate resources for the assessment.

Given the current interest in improving the efficiency of transfer credit assessment, the purpose of this project is to review institutional policies and practices of transfer credit assessment, and to identify issues and effectiveness of the assessment process.

Scope and Objectives

This study investigates policies and practices of transfer credit assessment at post-secondary institutions (PSI's) in BC and at key institutions across the country. Although out-of-province institutions are analyzed, the study focuses on policies and practices in BC.

The study analyzes policies and practices at different types of institutions – research-intensive universities, teaching-intensive universities, institutes, and colleges. Both public and private BC institutions are included in the study.

The objectives of this study are:

- To review policies that govern practices and timing of transfer assessment in institutions;
- To analyze transfer credit assessment processes and timing;
- To identify successful practices in transfer credit assessment; and
- To suggest areas for improvements in policies and procedures regarding credit assessment and timing.

¹ For example, BC's longstanding credit transfer system <http://www.bctransferguide.ca/>; or a U.S. nation-wide Transferology <https://www.transferology.com/> supported by University of Minnesota and the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities.

Methodology

The project methodology involved two parts:

1. A review of policies governing transfer credit assessment available on institutional websites. This online document review was aimed at identifying the presence or lack of transfer credit information, and
2. An analysis of institutional perspectives through a questionnaire developed and sent to institutions' professionals overseeing transfer credit assessment. These professionals included registrars, associate registrars, academic counselors, and directors of admissions.

The questionnaire was developed to cover the following:

- to discover whether policies on Transfer Credit Assessment have undergone recent revisions;
- to determine the effect of the timing of transfer credit evaluation on student decision to enrol;
- to identify issues and opportunities regarding the process and timing of transfer credit assessment; and
- to present institutional suggestions for improving the efficiency of the transfer credit assessment.

The questionnaire's validity was pre-tested before being sent out to seventeen BC PSIs and to four non-BC PSIs in March, 2014. Two reminders were sent at two later times to those that had not responded. By April 30, 2014, fourteen responses were received from BC PSIs and from one non-BC institution.

Table 1. Institutions invited to participate in the study

Institution	PSI Sector
British Columbia Institute of Technology (BCIT)	BC Institute
Camosun College (CAM)	BC Public College
Capilano University (CAPU)	BC Teaching Intensive University (BC TIU)
College of the Rockies (COTR)	BC Public College
Columbia College (Columbia)	BC Private College
Coquitlam College (Coquitlam)	BC Private College
Douglas College (DOUG)	BC Public College
Fairleigh Dickinson University (FDU)	BC Private University
Kwantlen Polytechnic University (KPU)	BC Teaching Intensive University (BC TIU)
Mount Royal University (MRU)	Non-BC University
Okanagan College (OKAN)	BC Public College
Simon Fraser University (SFU)	BC Research Intensive University (BC RIU)
Thompson Rivers University (TRU)	BC Research Intensive University (BC RIU)
Trinity Western University (TWU)	BC Private University
University of Alberta (UoA)	Non-BC University
University of British Columbia (UBC)	BC Research Intensive University (BC RIU)
University of Calgary (UoC)	Non-BC University
University of Fraser Valley (UFV)	BC Teaching Intensive University (BC TIU)
University of Toronto (UoT)	Non-BC University
University of Victoria (UVic)	BC Research Intensive University (BC RIU)
Vancouver Island University (VIU)	BC Teaching Intensive University (BC TIU)

The participation of institutions that took part in this study and, in particular, of the individuals who took time from their busy schedules to answer the questionnaire is gratefully acknowledged. Table 1 lists all institutions invited to participate in the study by their sector.

Review of Policies

Previous research identified institutional policies as one of the decisive factors in the timing of transfer credit assessment (Ott 2012). The current study investigated the presence or absence of policies on transfer credit assessment on the web, specific policies that may drive the timing of the assessment. The consistency of policies across PSIs, indications of recent policy revisions that might signal changing practices, and the ease of access to transfer-related on-line information was also assessed.

The search of the institutional websites highlighted two distinct kinds of policy. Of the 21 institutions invited to participate in the study, 10 had transfer-related policies adopted by Senate or Education Council. The earliest Senate-adopted transfer credit assessment policy identified dated back to 1986.

In several cases Senate-adopted policies primarily deal with articulation and coordination between institutions, and do not contain any specifics related to transfer credit assessment of individual students. Larger institutions (e.g., most universities) include exceptions related to specific faculties/ programs and provide links to admission requirements for transfer students in individual program websites.

The private institutions that participated did not have published policies. This can be attributed to the lack of “receiving” focus for private universities – transfer students do not constitute a large proportion of their

Information on transfer credit assessment (“unofficial policy”) was available in online calendars and related documents.

student body. These institutions did publish information on the ability to transfer their credits, consistent with their role as sending institutions.

Although the remaining eleven institutions did not publish dedicated transfer credit assessment policies, related information (“unofficial policy”) was available in online calendars and related documents under headings including:

- Admission Requirements;
- Transfer Students;
- Admission for Post-Secondary Students;
- Transferring Credits;
- Advising Centre;
- Admission for Students from Colleges, Universities, and Institutes.

Notably, KPU is currently undergoing a revision of their transfer credit assessment policy and procedures. The revisions, if adopted, would address a range of transfer-related issues, along with the granting of advanced standing. The draft policy introduces the requirement for transfer credit assessment during application process or before a student completes 30 credits at the receiving institution. The new requirements would set course currency limits on transferrable credits, specify requirements for transferring credits from recognized and other institutions, define authority and the timeliness of transfer credit assessment.

The following is list of topics that can be found in the majority of policies and transfer related information gathered during this study:

- **Procedures for transferring credit from BC, Canadian, and international institutions.**

Transfer credits from BC institutions often follow the BC Transfer Guide; a few PSI's refer to the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC).

- **Currency of credits.** Several institutions do not have requirements for transfer credit currency. On the other hand, a maximum of 10 years is not uncommon. Other examples include 7 years with individual case consideration for earlier courses, or 5 years for non-BC courses. Some time-sensitive programs may have shorter currency requirements (e.g., Engineering, Computer Science, Midwifery, Nursing, or Science). Consideration for courses completed earlier than the required currency can be given on an individual basis.
- **Minimum acceptable grade requirement.** There is a wide range of acceptable grades: from 50% (or D) in some colleges and universities to "C" in larger RIU's. Faculty of Engineering at the University of Toronto required a higher GPA of "B+".
- **Maximum allowable transfer credit.** At the point of admission, the policies reviewed in this study set the maximum allowable credit transfer between a low of 10% and a high of 75% of all program credits. Some programs have a minimum upper level course requirements or a capstone course requirement. In some cases transfer of upper level course credit is not allowed. An exception is Faculty of Engineering (University of Toronto), where transfer students, while assessed for meeting entry requirements using their transfer credits at admission, are "not granted advanced standing (transfer credits) and are required to begin their studies in First Year".

The policies reviewed in this study set the maximum allowable credit transfer between a low of 10% and a high of 75% of all program credits.

- **Timeliness of assessment of transfer credits.** The goal of completing transfer credit assessment within 6 weeks is mentioned in Senate-adopted policies at three PSI's. Other PSI's state their goals of doing the assessment as quickly as possible in their "unofficial" policies. Periods of 6-8 weeks or 4-6 weeks are not uncommon.
- **Document requirements.** These include the requirement of course outlines or syllabi for courses not listed in BC Transfer Guide or institutional database; or a requirement of translation of all transcripts/ course syllabi into English for non-English documents.
- **Types of transfer credits and how the types are defined.** This information typically includes procedures for granting assigned, unassigned, block transfer, and discipline credits.
- **Deadlines for applying for transfer credit assessment.** University of Toronto requires that students with previous post-secondary credits have them evaluated at admission and charges a fee. Also, the inability to apply for transfer credit evaluation at admission (e.g., at Faculty of Music at University of Toronto) forfeits all possible transfer credits. Seven PSI's post deadlines for transfer credit assessment requests on-line in Calendars or Admission Requirements. These pertain to both applicants and admitted students wishing to be on-time for course registration in the following term.

- **Fees for assessment of transfer credits** are also included in the transfer assessment information. Given that transfer credit assessment constitutes a significant cost for PSIs, such fees call for special discussion in relation to the cost of assessment. A well-developed provincial transfer system that enables articulation of within-province courses reduces the cost significantly for students transferring within province. The effects of BC Transfer System are reflected by the fact that the transfer credit assessment fees are usually not charged for courses transferring within BC Transfer System. Some exceptions do apply – Camosun College charges \$50 for assessment of a BC transcript.

However, Canadian transcripts outside of BC usually require higher assessment fees: \$25 at KPU, which charges no fee for BC transcripts; \$30 (Okanagan), \$75 (UFV) or \$80 (Camosun). Even higher international assessment fees are indicative of the higher institutional costs associated with such assessment: \$50 (KPU); \$100 (Camosun College); \$150 (Okanagan College); and \$250 (UFV). While the majority of institutions absorb the costs of assessing international courses or credentials and provide an internal transcript assessment and admission decision for international applicants, BCIT and FDU require for-fee assessment of international courses by an independent third-party organization. This assessment is required of admitted students only, and is not related to assessments used as the basis of admission. On the other hand, University of Toronto mandates assessment at admission and routinely charges \$30 fee for all domestic and international transfer requests.

The on-line information shows that most PSIs assess transfer credit as a part of admission process, or the applicant can request transfer credit evaluation “once admitted” (Appendix A).

The majority of institutions assess transfer credits before the student accepts the Offer of Admission.

It is obvious, however, that institutions receive requests from potential applicants hoping to assess their transfer credits even earlier than admission and application review. Some PSIs policies include statements similar to the following:

“Due to the large number of applicants to our programs and the complexity of transfer credit assessment, we are unable to do preliminary advising on post-secondary transfer credit.”
(University of Alberta)

“Transcript evaluation services prior to admission is currently not available.” (COTR)

The majority of institutions assess transfer credits before the student accepts the Offer of Admission (Table 2). Six institutions do not have a “fixed” timing of transfer credit assessment: four institutions indicate that they can complete transfer credit assessment at any time during the admission or studies at their institution, and two PSIs can complete the assessment at any time during a student’s enrolment at their institution. Perhaps at a higher cost for themselves, most PSIs strive to provide service for transfer applicants by limiting the uncertainty in applicants’ decision-making. Overall, colleges and BCIT show tendency to do the assessment once an applicant commits to the institution, and larger BC institutions tend to assess transfer credit during admissions, before an applicant becomes a student (Table 2). Several divisions of the University of Toronto (which is a large institution), however, require acceptance of the admissions offer before evaluating transfer credit. Camman et al. (2014) report similar practice at other large Ontario universities, e.g., Carleton, Queen’s, Ryerson, Waterloo, and York.

Table 2. Timing of transfer credit assessment as described in online policies

Timing		Institutions
Admissions Process	Application Review	UoT (Faculty of Engineering) UoA MRU SFU UBC UVic
	Admitted/ Offer Made	UoC (for international students) UoT (Faculty of Arts and Science) CAPU VIU TWU FDU TRU
	Offer Accepted	UoT (Faculty of Kinesiology; Faculty of Music; U of T Mississauga) COTR OKAN DOUG
Upon applicant/ student request		UFV KPU (possibly changing policy to include a deadline to apply for assessment within a period after registration) CAM BCIT (only once registered) Columbia (only once registered) Coquitlam (only once registered)

*note: separate departmental policies within one institution have been accounted separately

There are recurring challenges in assessing the timing of transfer credit assessment due to variations in the use of specific terms across institutions. For example, institutions may state that they assess transfer credit for students “once admitted”, but it is not always clear whether this would occur at the time of offer, or only after an offer is accepted. Similarly, the interpretation of the term “student” when describing the timing of transfer credit assessment is often not clear. The term can be an indication that assessment is performed only after the applicant becomes a student, i.e., after they have accepted the offer of admission, and possibly, have registered.

There can be several reasons why institutions might prefer to wait for students to accept the offer of admission before transfer credit assessment, and then to provide opportunities for application for transfer credit assessment for registered students during any point of their studies at the PSI. The reasons include insignificant numbers of incoming transfer students, uniqueness of programs, and limitations of resources to assess transfer credits at the time of application review.

Transfer Credit Assessment Practices as Viewed by Institutional Professionals

Institutional professionals were surveyed to capture their perspectives on successful practices in transfer credit assessment and how the practices might be improved. Responses were received from 15 institutions (14 BC and 1 non-BC PSIs), and they provide a deeper view on the timing of transfer credit assessment. The questionnaire (questions are found in Appendix B) indicated that six BC institutions (one BC TIU, three BC Public Colleges, a BC Institute, and a BC Private College) do not require transfer credit assessment at the time of admission, except for specific programs that mandate such assessment (e.g., block transfer for 3-rd year admission). Some institutions that routinely assess all credits at admission require applicant-initiated request for Prior Learning Assessment (PLAR) evaluation. The responses support the notion of dual purposes of transfer credit assessment – transfer credits as the basis of admission and as a substitution for program courses – and the differences in timing for those purposes:

“Transfer credit is assessed as part of the admissions process for Advanced Placement and degree programs only. Individual credit for courses in a student’s program are assessed based on the student’s request after the student is accepted into the Institute.” (BC Institute)

“The amount of unassigned transfer credit has increased with the increased numbers of international out-of-country (outside of the US) post-secondary applications. Generally, we do not articulate specific international post-secondary transfer credit and present unassigned credit at the point of admission so that only students who accept our offer of admission may then request articulation of their courses for more credit.” (BC RIU)

However, more institutions are leaning towards requiring transfer credit assessment at the point of admission, as revealed by recent policy and practice revisions. The questionnaire responses confirmed that a new policy on one TIU proposes introducing the requirement of transfer credit assessment at admission or during the first year at the university. The new draft policy includes the requirements for turn-around of transfer credit assessments. Another change was identified by a BC RIU:

“Historically many transfer credit assessments were done just prior to graduation. We have moved away from this process; however, there are still a few active files”.

Out of 15 respondents, 12 assess all credits on a submitted transcript, and 3 institutions only evaluate courses applicable to the applicant’s or student’s program. A BC Public College has recently changed their practices from assessing only program-relevant credits to all credits: *“Past practice was to assess transfer credits only applicable to the program student was in and/or applied to. Current practice is to assess all credits for transfer”.*

Two universities and one public college have a two-tier practice: assessing all courses during admission, and relevant courses (or courses that were given unspecified/ unassigned credit during admission) only at the request of the admitted student based on their specific program.

“We assess all credits for transfer. This may result in unassigned credit that the student requests specific credit review once they are within a particular program (in order to meet degree/program requirements).” (BC RIU)

“We will look at all credit, but will focus on applicable courses for program as requested by student.” (BC Public College)

Although there was a perception that “offering unassigned credit at the point of admission is confusing to students who would prefer specific credit” (BC RIU), there is value in limiting the amount of time spent on the assessment during the admissions process, and later focusing on credit applicable to the student’s program. During their assessment at admissions, a Non-BC University “skips” courses that have not previously been assessed and entered into their database in order for these courses to be evaluated when/ if a student requests the assessment. One drawback of having a two-tier process is adding pressure to academic advising or registration staff when a student decides to register for courses with specific pre-requisites.

Bureaucratic Structure of Transfer Credit Assessment

Transfer credit assessment often requires coordination of decisions between administrative offices and academic faculty, and this impacts the timing of when the student is informed of the assessment results (GAO 2005). Good coordination is needed between institutional departments if both administrative and academic departments are involved in the assessment.

The typical transfer credit assessment is carried out by a Registrar’s Office (eight responses) by personnel responsible for transfer. Other institutions assess credit in departments including Admissions, Advising, Records, or Enrolment Management. If a course does not have an established equivalency in the institutional or provincial database, academic units are typically consulted, and the course equivalency is established based on a detailed course outline provided by the student. The assessment provided by the faculty is often registered in the institutional databases.

Good coordination is needed between institutional departments if both administrative and academic departments are involved in the assessment.

“If a course is not articulated and is not listed on our internal transfer tables, transfer credit is assessed by the Admissions Advisor in the Registrar’s Office for unspecified credit (i.e. Arts 3cr). If the course is then meant to be updated in the internal transfer tables, it is sent to the specific department for specific (or unassigned) departmental credit (i.e. Math 100).” (BC RIU)

“Assessment is done by the Transfer Credit office which is a branch of the Enrolment Management department. Syllabi are only requested and evaluated by appropriate faculty if there is no decision on the BC Transfer Guide or within our internal database, or if the course is more than 5 years old.” (BC Private University)

“The Registrar’s Office oversees the Transfer of Credit process. The work is primarily done by the Articulation Officer who works with content experts on determining equivalency.” (BC Public College)

Two institutions refer to third-party independent evaluation services, such as World Education Services (WES) or International Credential Evaluation Service (ICES), for out-of-country credits, if determining the course status in-house is too problematic. The use of evaluation services typically increases the amount of time needed to inform a student about the results of their transfer credit assessment.

Does Timing of Assessment Affect Student Enrolment?

All but two questionnaire respondents indicated that assessment timing and process impact students' decisions. Although no quantitative studies have been carried out to test this assumption, the anecdotal evidence from faculty advisors, international offices, and recruitment personnel suggests that early assessment of transfer credit is positively linked with enrolment. The early assessment is perceived as giving value to the applicants (helping applicants' decision-making) and the institution (positive image as a provider of good service).

"Absolutely! If transfer credit assessment is not done in a timely manner, students tend to get upset or impatient with us. The quicker they can know how their courses transfer, the quicker they can decide whether or not they want to transfer. For the majority of students, their decision to enrol is based upon transferability of previous course work." (BC Private University)

"Assigning of transfer credit early we feel has a positive impact on student enrolment. Assigning transfer credit at the time of admission gives the student a better idea of where they are in their program, and how long it will take them to finish. Our degrees allow 75% transfer in so we could not do academic advising if transfer credit was not assigned early." (BC TIU)

The anecdotal evidence from faculty advisors, international offices, and recruitment personnel suggests that early assessment of transfer credit is positively linked with enrolment.

"We believe that the applicant should have information on their transfer equivalencies (as much as possible) prior to accepting their offer of admission. We have intentionally aligned the Transfer Articulation unit with Admissions and Recruitment to ensure attention was being paid to the timing of the assessment. Although we do not have hard evidence, we do believe that providing transfer assessment to the applicant early on helps them make an informed decision about attending University and also represents University as a service oriented institution." (Non-BC University)

Three institutions particularly noted that the impact of timing on international students' enrolment is the greatest.

"We believe it can impact the student's decision. We hear this often with respect to International students who want transfer decisions before making acceptance decisions and are under greater time restraints due to student visa requirements." (BC TIU)

"International applicants want to compare transfer credit at multiple institutions." (BC Public College)

"International students are probably more interested to know what credit they would be assigned before they finish the application process." (BC TIU)

Two of the respondents (BC Institute and BC Private College) have not perceived any impact of assessment timing on enrolment. This phenomenon may be attributed to the uniqueness of programs, for which there are few competing alternatives. Another factor can be a small number of applicants bringing transfer credits. However, even if there is a perceived impact at the institution, it was noted that a variety of factors are at play in the decision to enroll, "including the student and the program they applied to" (BC RIU).

Issues in Transfer Credit Assessment

Four institutions did not identify any issues related to the timing of transfer credit assessment. However, for the majority of respondents the length of the process, the volume, and the time and resources needed to add records were of greatest concern. The complexity of assessment with the increased mobility of students, when transcripts from multiple institutions are presented for evaluation, was also noted.

“We often take way too long to get credit assessed.” (BC TIU)

“There is a growing volume of transfer credit requests as it is not usual for students to attend several institutions. Many students who apply have several credentials from a variety of institutions.” (BC Public College)

“Applicants/ students are directly impacted with long processing times in relation to admission, registration and graduation.” (BC TIU)

“Seasonality” of assessment work also impacts the timing: a lot of transfer credit requests are received prior to Fall term during Summer. This issue is exacerbated by the fact that not all staff and faculty are available in summer.

“Summer vacations by faculty may cause delays in assessment.” (BC Public College)

“The staff spend a significant amount of time processing transfer credit especially in spring/ summer.” (BC TIU)

Involvement of the academic units may lengthen the process: a BC TIU observes that the process can get extended from 6-12 weeks to 2-4 months. The amount of time needed depends upon specific practices of each academic unit. This finding echoes suggestions (Ott, 2012; Ott & Cooper, 2014) for reaching greatest effectiveness when the assessment is done in one division of an institution (e.g., in Admissions only, not

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in Admissions and Registrar). In practice, however, the diversity of institutional structures among PSIs precludes recommending doing transfer credit assessment in one division as a possible “best practice”.

“Currently the process is long and there are inconsistent practices for various programs. We are working on streamlining.” (BC RIU)

“Our process seems cumbersome at times, particularly since departments all have varying practices around articulation evaluations.” (BC TIU)

Posted deadlines for assessment requests helped some institutions to improve the efficiency of their processes.

“There is a deadline for each semester to ensure that the necessary transfer credits are on a student’s record in time for registration/pre-requisite checking.” (BC Public College)

“Since deadlines have been published, we are able to manage the workload more effectively but in most cases the student does not receive the response prior to registration in courses for the first semester.” (Non-BC University)

“Although we have published deadlines, we have a rush on transfer credit evaluation during registration periods.” (BC Public College)

Even for institutions with posted deadlines for transfer credit requests, 10 institutions noted issues with pre-requisite checking, especially for international and out-of-province applicants, and requests submitted outside the identified timelines.

To summarize, the main issues around transfer credit assessment pertained to the following:

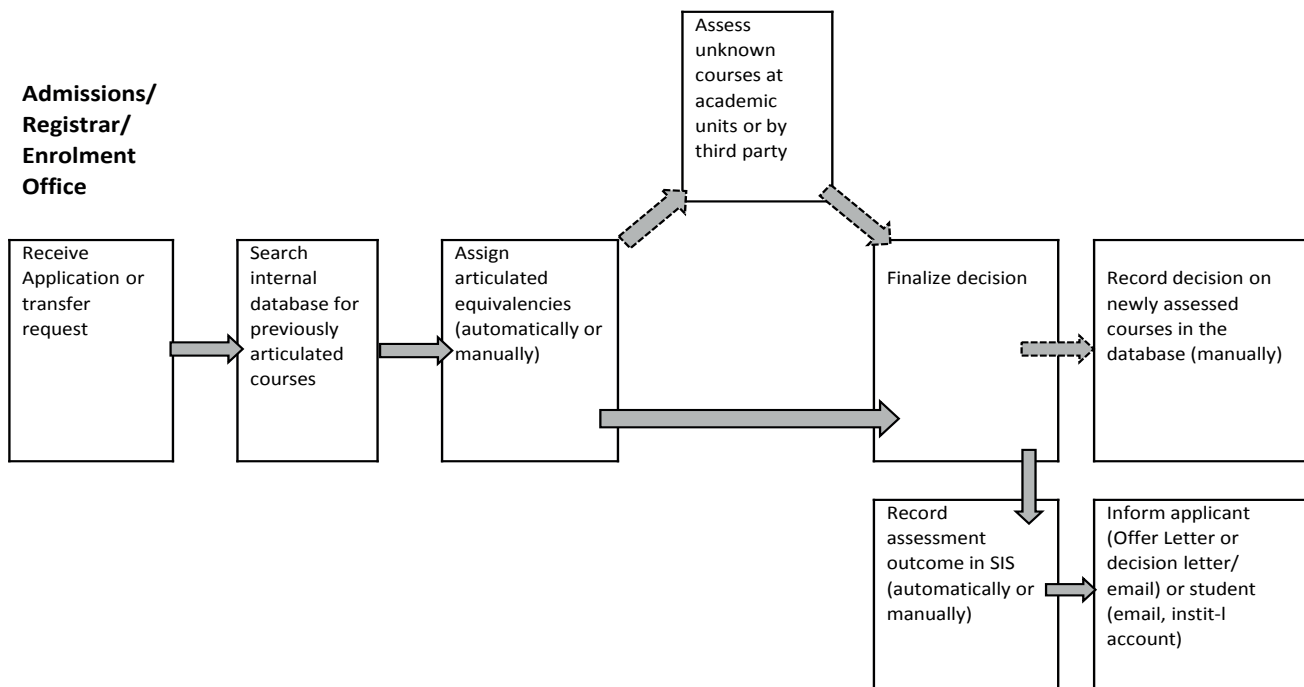
- The length of the process, the volume, and the time and resources needed to add records
- The complexity of assessment with the increased mobility of applicants/ students
- “Seasonality” of assessment, and
- Involvement of multiple units (e.g. academic departments) and their diverse practices

Automation as an Efficient Practice for Transfer Credit Assessment

As Ott (2012) points out, the use of technology has potential to increase the effectiveness of transfer credit evaluation. Respondents to the current survey similarly identified automated transfer credit assessment as a successful practice. Of 15 respondents, three institutions (BC TIU, BC Public College and BC Private College) do not use automation at all.

One of the aspects of technology identified in the literature (Ott, 2012; Paez, Byrnes, Blacker, Jackson, & Dwyer, 2011) is the use of a database of articulated courses. The group of researchers led by Paez (2011) reported a 3.5 fold increase in the length of transfer credit assessment in jurisdictions without a published database (See also J. Jarvis & Associates (2004)). Thirteen respondents indicated that they utilized an internal database of articulated courses that enabled manual or automated transfer credit assignment (Figure 2). The databases of articulated courses are updated regularly. Courses new to the system are usually entered into the database of articulated courses manually.

Figure 2. Transfer credit assessment with a database of articulated courses



“If the courses have been previously articulated, for many programs, the assessment is automatic once the data has been entered into our student information system.” (BC RIU)

“Once an equivalency has been established, the course is entered into our Student Information System. We indicate when the credit was evaluated and the end date is kept open as long as the equivalency is valid.” (BC Public College)

Three institutions (a BC TIU, a BC Institute, and a BC Private University) provide a searchable on-line access to their database of assessed courses to applicants and students. The searchable database at the BC Private University contains courses from Canadian and several U.S. PSIs. The databases at the other two institutions only contain information about transferrable course equivalencies from BC institutions. In addition, one BC RIU has a course equivalency database of home and international courses for students going abroad. All institutions refer their transfer applicants and students to provincial on-line databases, such as BC Transfer Guide, Transfer Agreements database by Alberta Council on Admissions and Transfer (ACAT), or Ontario Transfer Guide maintained by Council on Articulation and Transfer (ONCAT). The respondents echoed the findings in other sources (Bautsch, 2013; Compton, Tafel, Law, & Gustafson, 2012; Usher & Jarvey, 2011) that an existing provincial or state searchable database provides significant benefits for applicants and students, and can be considered “best practices”. Combined with the ongoing effort of establish transfer credit protocols across Canada (BCCAT, 2014), an accessible equivalency database, especially for case-by-case transfer course assessments, could facilitate student pathways and credential recognition across provincial borders

However, none of the institutions provides an online application for transfer credit assessment, which may be a next step in facilitating the assessment process.

Adding application for transfer credit assessment to a general on-line application would reduce the amount of time and resources needed for evaluation, facilitate the process for the applicant. Currently on-line transfer credit evaluation request forms are available at 8 out of 15 respondent institutions, but these need to be printed out and submitted as a hard copy with supporting documentation (transcripts, and if applicable, course syllabi).

Several institutions have a fully automated transfer credit assessment for previously articulated courses, where the credit is automatically recorded into the student information system. After the previously assessed courses are automatically added into student/applicant file, all other courses are assessed manually.

“All BC Transfer Guide articulations are programmed into our system and a large number of Canadian University/College/CEGEP courses from institutions from which we receive large numbers of transfer applicants.” (BC RIU)

“If existing articulation agreements or precedents are in the system, those can automatically be assigned before the rest of the student’s transcript is assessed.” (BC TIU)

Most institutions, however, rely on manual assessment and data entry; and some consider automation a desirable practice.

“Best practice would be an automated process with online resources students can use. This would need to be tied into a study plan so that students can see what credits they have been assessed and how they can use them toward a specific program”. (BC RIU)

Eight respondents felt confident about their handling of transfer credit assessment and efficiency of their practices. These include institutions with automated practices, as well as PSI’s where practices are fully

manual. For many smaller institutions, automation, while desirable, is not practical given the resources available. Regardless of their capacity, all institutions expressed their commitment to offering good service to students and to creating organizational efficiency wherever possible.

Conclusion

There are two key principles which might motivate improvements in transfer credit assessment. First, the practice has to respond to applicants'/ students' needs. Second, improving the efficiency of institutional practices is increasingly important during periods of budget restraint.

Greater Availability of Information for Students

From an applicant/ student perspective, available and easily accessible information for their decision-making can remove uncertainty and anxiety about post-secondary education choices. All institutions in the study have policies and procedures on-line, and the information is easily found by searching for either "transfer" or "transfer credit" on the institutional web-site or through a web-search engine (e.g., Google).

Ideally, on-line access to searchable database of all transferrable courses would eliminate the need to refer to advisors or to wait for formal letters of offer in at least some cases. Although institutions refer to province-wide searchable databases of such courses

where they are available, assisting applicants or students by listing out-of-province institutions that the institution has previously assessed courses from and, possibly, precedent and/ or most frequent courses appears helpful. The University of Maryland provides potential students with some of the most extensive services, including an extreme example of pre-transfer advising, which is available to anyone exploring transfer to the university and is linked to improved facilitation of transfer (Forbes & Howell, 2014).

Linking the transferrable courses to a study plan could lessen the pressure on advisors that arises after the student has accepted the offer of admission and reviewed their transfer credit assessment for their specific program of study. The availability of the information is viewed more positively by the prospective students if the information is available prior to their commitment to a specific institution, or even before spending time and energy on applying to that institution.

Institutional Resources and Efficiency

From the institutional perspective, increased automation of transfer credit assessment, including a current, published database of established equivalencies and the capacity to record the applicable credit into students' files in the student information system reflects the elements recommended as best practice by respondents. Previous BCCAT research on case-by-case transfer assessment showed that sharing of databases with established equivalencies by major provincial universities would increase system-wide

There are two key principles which might motivate improvements in transfer credit assessment. First, the practice has to respond to applicants'/ students' needs. Second, improving the efficiency of institutional practices is increasingly important during periods of budget restraint.

BC institutions benefit from the BC Transfer System, and the selected non-BC universities also operate in provinces with a transfer infrastructure in place. An extension of this current project could focus on major institutions in provinces with less-developed course-to-course articulation systems and/or major destinations for international students.

efficiency of transfer credit assessment at all public institutions. The shared database would be particularly beneficial for assessments of international or non-BC applicants.

Although investing resources and staff time into transfer credit assessment prior to an applicant's decision to commit to the institution may seem counter-intuitive from the efficiency point of view, the benefits flowing from providing responsive service to students are certainly an important counter-balance. The majority of cases suggest that, if the institutional capacity is sufficient, transfer credit assessment should be done during the application process or, at least, as early as possible.

Making transfer a priority by dedicating transfer-related staff or staff time and expertise can be beneficial for improving transfer credit assessment. Building Admissions/ Registrar/ Enrolment Office staff awareness and expertise in transfer issues can shorten the turn-around of the assessment, as less coordination between institutional units and less time are required for getting the transfer credit assessed. Providing consistent and transparent procedures and work flows for faculty and staff to follow can facilitate consistency of assessment. Dedicating staff or staff time to transfer would ensure the credit is entered into the system as soon as possible in order to enable appropriate academic advising.

Future Research

This study analyzed transfer credit assessment policies and practices of post-secondary institutions that operate in an environment with developed transfer systems. BC institutions benefit from the BC Transfer System, and the selected non-BC universities also operate in provinces (Ontario and Alberta) with a transfer infrastructure in place. Assessing international transcripts presents a major resource drain for institutions with many international applicants, and given that most of the international courses are not articulated, the transfer credit evaluation process resembles that of assessments done in provinces where transfer is facilitated to a lesser extent. An extension of this current project could focus on major institutions in provinces with less-developed course-to-course articulation systems and/or major destinations for international students. Such research could more specifically address the processes and costs of assessing international transfer credit. With the current emphasis on internationalization of post-secondary education in BC and in Canada, this project would inform PSI admissions and registrarial professionals about the strategies, challenges, and successes involved in these types of assessment, which are particularly onerous for institutions, and which may become more prevalent given current post-secondary trends in Canada.

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Appendix A.

Excerpts of Institutional Policies on the Timing of Transfer Credit Assessment

Institution	PSI Sector	Quotes on the Timing from Institutional Websites (emphasis added to highlight the wording on the timing)
Mount Royal University	Non-BC University	Upon receipt of an application for admission and an official transcript from each current or previously attended post-secondary institution, transfer course equivalencies are assessed.
University of Toronto	Non-BC University	The timing of assessment vary by division. 1. Once offered admission , an online application [for transfer credit assessment]... is required... The assessment of previous post-secondary studies for transfer credit is compulsory. (Faculty of Arts and Science) 2. To assist us in assessing transfer credits, at the time of application , applicants should submit course descriptions for each university-level course taken. (Faculty of Engineering) 3. Transfer credit assessments are completed after an admitted student has accepted his or her offer . (Faculty of Kinesiology) 4. Transfer credits will not be assessed unless you have been accepted to the program . The transfer credit process is not automatic. (Faculty of Music) 5. Transfer credit assessment priority will be given to students who have accepted their U of T Mississauga offer of admission.
University of Alberta	Non-BC University	Transfer credit is automatically assessed at the time of admission .
University of Calgary	Non-BC University	International Students: After an offer of admission has been made , transcripts and course outlines will be reviewed to determine if any transfer credits may be awarded.
Capilano University	BC TIU	Eligible transfer credit is usually assigned at the time of admission .
Kwantlen Polytechnic University	BC TIU	University recognizes that many of its students may wish to be granted formal recognition for knowledge acquired at other educational institutions. Through the transfer credit process, a student who has completed courses at another post-secondary institution may request that these credits be transferred.
University of Fraser Valley	BC TIU	Transfer credit is routinely assessed for students enrolled in, or applying to , University programs at the undergraduate level. Other University students may request transfer credit in writing.
Vancouver Island University	BC TIU	Transfer credit will be assessed after you have been admitted as a student and University has received your official transcripts.
Simon Fraser University	BC RIU	We will assess possible transfer credit only after we have received your admission application .
Thompson Rivers University	BC RIU	Once admitted , you will be assessed for transfer credit by the Admissions Office. University will recognize, and will credit toward its degrees, all relevant course work completed by transfer students during the first two years of university study in Canada... if The transfer student is deemed admissible and has been presented with an offer of admission .

University of British Columbia	BC RIU	The minimum academic standing to qualify for admission to the University as a transfer student is successful completion of 24 transferable credits with a C average.
University of Victoria	BC RIU	Eligible transfer credit is usually assigned as part of the admission process . Simply apply online and send in your transcripts. Within a few weeks you'll receive a transfer evaluation with a course-by-course description of how your credit transfers. Once you've been accepted, an academic adviser will provide hands-on assistance as you enroll in a program.
Camosun College	BC Public College	Many students come to College having already completed some courses at other colleges or universities. Often that coursework can be evaluated for credit towards a College credential. To have your official post-secondary transcripts evaluated to determine academic course equivalency towards College programs, please download and complete the request form.
College of the Rockies	BC Public College	Transfer credit will only be evaluated after you have been accepted into a program and are able to determine the transfer credits for which you may be eligible.
Douglas College	BC Public College	To ensure transfer credit is done in time for your registration , your request must be received by the following deadlines. If you have been admitted to the College after the above deadlines and require courses to be transferred to meet pre-requisites for registration, please contact the appropriate department. You may be able to request a pre-requisite override. Overrides are granted at the discretion of the department.
Okanagan College	BC Public College	Transfer credit will only be evaluated after you accept your Offer of Admission . Unfortunately, we are unable to advise you what transfer credits you are eligible for before you apply and are accepted into a program.
Fairleigh Dickinson University	BC Private University	International Students: Once you are admitted into the university, you will be required to obtain a World Educational Services (WES) evaluation of your foreign credentials for transfer credit eligibility. Without a WES evaluation, there is no guarantee that we will be able to award you transfer credits for your work.
Trinity Western University	BC Private University	An official transfer credit assessment will be completed upon submission of a completed application. Once you are admitted to University, we will also conduct a transfer credit evaluation to let you know how your credits are transferring in.
British Columbia Institute of Technology	BC Institute	Transfer credit will be awarded based on the assessment already done and the grade already granted by the sending institution whose learning outcomes have been deemed equivalent to the requested course within the student's chosen program . Completed applications must be submitted to Student Record or Student Information & Enrolment Services within 14 days into the Term.

Appendix B. The Questionnaire

1. Do you have policies and procedures on Transfer Credit Assessment?
2. Are they published on your institution's website? If yes, please send link. If not, please send copies of your policies and procedures. If not all published on web, please provide.
3. At what stage of the process do you assess courses that are transferable? Is it done as part of the admission process and if so is it assessed, once you receive a student application for admission to your institution, upon acceptance to a program, or only upon the student's request? If transfer credit is not assessed as part of the admissions process please specify when.
4. Is the assessment done in the Registrar's Office (Admission, Records, Advising...etc.)? Please specify which area. If it is done by faculty or discipline experts outside the Registrar's Office please indicate.
5. Is the transfer credit process automated at your institution? If yes, to what extent is it automated? For instance, can students apply for transfer credit online? Do you have your articulation agreements built into your Student Record System allowing for automatic assessment?
6. Do you consider the timing and procedures of transfer credit assessment may affect the student's decision to enroll at your institution? Please indicate if the timing has a positive, negative, or no impact on students' decisions to enroll at your institution and why?
7. Do you have any issues or concerns regarding credit transfer or the timing of transfer assessment at your institution?
8. Do you consider your practice to be "Best Practice"? If not, can you suggest a method or an example of best practice?
9. Do you have residency requirements around transfer credit and are they the same for all programs?
10. Do you assess all credits for transfer or only what is applicable to the program the student is in or applying for?
11. Is pressure put on the admissions process by students wanting to know what credits will transfer prior to admission?
12. Do you experience pressures during the admissions and registration processes due to adding transfer credits on the student's record for prerequisite checking?
13. Do you accept studies or courses taken as part of professional accreditation as transfer credit such as CGA? Please list other accreditation bodies from which you accept credit transfer.

BC Council on
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